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I LIVE IN VIRGINIA

BY
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FOREWORD

WHEN I knew that I was going to be at home for several years I resolved to study my own state and my own people and to record in a notebook what I heard and observed. This intention, when announced to my older sister, provoked advice which I have tried to remember.

"If you are going to write about Virginia," Mary said when she came down from New York where she had lived long enough to see what was familiar in a clearer light, "try to tell both sides. Life here is not just a tale of fine old families who live in fine old houses enclosed by fine old box hedges; but neither is it just a tale of starving textile workers and mistreated Negroes. Why not write about various kinds of people we see here? If you did that truthfully, it might be fair for an outsider to say, 'This is a real picture of life in one Southern state.' Reading about Richmond aristocracy, for example, does not give a stranger much idea of the life most people in the South know. A good part of what passes popularly as life in Virginia is as truly Southern as Miss Mary Pickford in "Coquette" and, even when it is truly Southern, usually it speaks only for one class of society."

I have written what is purely a personal account of various adventures I have experienced and of some memorable

people, both native and foreign, whom I met on Old Dominion soil.

It has been good to know a governor, a few politicians, some ladies and gentlemen; it has been enlightening to know in the flesh Bishop James Cannon, a Baptist Superintendent of Schools, and some eminent Virginia Lions who would have delighted Mr. Mencken in his happiest days. It has been a privilege, for which one so young as I should be grateful, to know a wise woman like Miss Ellen Glasgow and a famous beauty like Princess Troubetzkoy of Castle Hill and a moderately amusing philosopher like Mr. Cabell; but it has been a privilege as well to go to Union meetings with Francis J. Gorman and Roxy Dodson, to work in the mills with Essie and Beulah (who folded diapers), and Jewel and Althonia (who hemmed the sheets for your bed). To know one part of a society is not enough. If I tell you about the time Lady Astor came back to her home-place for a royal welcome, I must tell you as fully about the time my friend, Chief of Police J. Hannibal Martin, arrested fifty visitors from Hopewell who said they came to attend a Booster meeting of the local Union. And I must not forget Mr. Goldman of Crooktown, Mr. Jay Wellington of Hollywood, or Mr. Laurence Stallings of Yanceyville.

If I speak of our University there must be more than the spirit of Jefferson on the spacious lawn, since, across the street from the Rotunda, there are rows of boarding-houses and not far away there are the degenerates of Shifflett's Hollow. If I speak of Lexington and its Virginia Military Institute, the most beloved of all our state's anomalies, what goes on inside the gray walls of barracks is more interesting than the dress parade which tourists come so reverently to see. And, when we journey to Virginia Beach, shall we praise nothing save the beautiful shore, shall we be confined

to gentle old ladies sniffing salt air and pretend that we never saw a Virginian on his annual spree?

What I wrote in my notebook was sometimes amusing, sometimes sad. From a varied record comes this account of a few seasons in Virginia.

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I
PITTSYLVANIA

I

PITTSYLVANIA

I

PITTSYLVANIA COUNTY welcomes you and Danville urges you to make yourself at home. Enter from the North by the great textile plants and strong-smelling tobacco factories along the Dan. Or enter from the South and drive past the tumbled-down Negro shacks of Jackson's Branch, past poor little Providence Hospital for Colored and the fine Memorial Hospital for Whites, past Mount Vernon Methodist Church where mill officials and tobaccoists lift up their Sabbath prayers.

Just before South Main leads into Main there is an unusually wide yard in which there stands a rambling white house behind a grove of oaks and elms. The lines of the house are ugly and the boxwood along the myrtle-edged brick walk is scraggly; there is merely a glimpse of the garden. Only the towering elms could have made the place seem more interesting than its commonplace neighbors, ornate structures with over-trimmed porches and other enemies of the dignified simplicity which older houses had cherished.

The rambling white house was my home. Each afternoon I returned from a public school nearby where I was trying to teach some rudiments of French and English grammar to boys and girls not much younger than myself,

scholars who were even more reluctant to learn than I was to teach. Eager to release what little energy I had left in work that produced results one could see and treasure, I put on old clothes and devoted the rest of my day to the big garden I had made in a back lot where hideous out-houses and piles of débris had stood a few years before.

Gardening was a respectable pastime for a young teacher in a Southern high school. There was nothing in it to offend my superior, the Superintendent, who, after I had signed a contract to teach in his and the patrons' school, became alarmed as to whether I would prove to be a satisfactory part of his educational machine.

"Something has been said in connection with your appointment," he had written after I had borrowed money to go to France on the strength of the contract, "and I deem it a kindness to give you the opportunity to make adequate reply. While by strict interpretation of our fundamental principles of service none would have a right to inquire into your views in matters religious, nevertheless it is doubtful if a teacher could succeed here, in his relations to pupils and patrons, if his views on religion were particularly unorthodox or if his belief in Deity were in doubt."

I was twenty years young and sadly unprepared to make the adequate reply. My inexperience led me to say that I supposed I had just as much belief in Deity as anybody else and, besides, I was employed to teach English and French and not to parade my views, orthodox or unorthodox, before students in their teens. The Superintendent, after some to-do on the part of my friends, accepted my answer and said that we would let the matter of Deity drop and that his personal regard for me was not lessened. It was all very difficult and the prospect had not seemed too cheerful. But really it had not been half so bad as I had feared. I taught adjectives and irregular verbs. I talked

about Hawthorne to the Seniors without dwelling upon *The Scarlet Letter*. I avoided scrupulously all matters pertaining to the Deity. I attended long sessions devoted to Methods of Education. I tried to conform.

The only charge of unorthodoxy that could have been laid against me was that, in spite of being thwarted by limited knowledge on my part and little linguistic talent on the part of most of my students, I ignored the example of my predecessor by failing to treat French as a dead language which, like Latin, began and ended with painful translation. But this was of no great importance; my superiors were not especially inclined toward foreign languages and it was their policy to leave me alone as far as the French was concerned. It was what I did, said, or thought outside the classroom that mattered.

Everything went along smoothly during the first session and it seemed as though I had proved, contrary to all expectations, to be as harmless as anyone else. It was not until the second session of my teaching that there came temptation—temptation which I could not resist.

There was trouble in the cotton mills, trouble which, according to some commentators, was to be an important chapter in the labor history of the South. The United Press wanted me to write for them. Now I knew I ought to stick to the safety of French grammar and gardening but I said to myself, "Hell, I've got to get out of this narrow rut or I'll grow old before my time."

So I hurried to the Superintendent's office and waited until the coy blonde secretary granted me audience with her chief. The Superintendent, a bespectacled, solemn-faced Baptist, listened gravely as I told him that I wanted to report activities in the labor field for an outside news agency which had nothing to do with our *Danville Register and Bee*.

"Wouldn't this interfere with your school duties?" he said. "And don't you feel that it might be unwise for a teacher to be connected with a labor dispute?"

"I assure you I won't let it interfere with school duties," I replied. "I'll do my reporting during leisure hours, hours when other teachers are going to the movies or just sitting around doing what they please. And, as to the labor dispute, I hope to be an impartial observer. Anyway, my articles will not be read in Danville. Really it can't make any difference—"

"Well, then," the educator said at length and with the tone of a relenting parent to a pleading child, "I give you my permission but I am trusting you to be *very* discreet."

2

WITH this obstacle conquered I went to school in the morning with new enthusiasm born of the knowledge that the eventual life of a reporter waited me when papers were graded and sentences corrected and the last delinquents sent home to our honorable patrons. The fall afternoons and evenings flew by as time always did in Virginia when work was interesting. There was much to be done: I must be familiar with what the capitalists had to say for themselves and, even if it meant death to social standing, whatever that might be, I must know all about this Union that had come South, as people in town were saying, to stir up trouble in the greatest cotton mills in the world.

Fortunately and unfortunately, President Harry Fitzgerald was my father's golf companion and his daughter was my friend. After I got permission to report the labor dispute, Harriett and I went for a long walk through the autumn-colored woods along Stony Creek and it was then that we aired our views. I had no fear of talking frankly.

Although Harriett's natural devotion to her father might have kept her from looking at this quarrel with the same discernment and tolerance she had in most matters, she was too intelligent to close her mind entirely to the workers' story. She was considerably more open-minded to the Union's argument than were the majority of Danville citizens, many of whom could see no further than the issue of dividends and stocks.

We debated amicably as we walked along the moss-covered edges of the creek.

"We've got to look at this thing straight," I said. "There are four thousand mill workers here and they're going to call a strike. There's no doubt about that. What we want to know is why they're dissatisfied and who is right and who is wrong. They're sore because their wages have been cut again and because of what they claim to be a terrible stretch-out. Then there's the refusal of right to organize. All in all, they say their life is a hell on earth."

"You mean the paid organizers say so," Harriett retorted. "If the workers have complaints to make, they have their Industrial Democracy to take care of their grievances. They elect their own representatives and Papa and the rest of the officers welcome their criticisms."

"Yes, Harriett, that sounds fair enough. But the workers tell me that the overseers and lesser lights make it hot for them if they dare to criticize anything. I believe your father is fine in all his direct personal relations with the workers but — after all —"

With that I stopped short, realizing that candor with the best of us only goes so far. I did not intend to speak to Harriett of her father's affliction — the acute deafness and impediment of speech — which, according to many of his critics, was making it increasingly difficult for him to know what was happening in the mills.

"These mills have been Papa's lifework. The textile industry fascinates him more than anything in the world, just like painting fascinates me. And the labor angle has interested him most of all. He's done everything possible to make living conditions decent in the Village. Look at the Welfare work, the Y, the band concerts, the recreational facilities. What does the Union say about all these things?"

"They say the workers had rather have the money in their pay envelopes at the end of the week. They say it would be better to do away with all this Welfare business rather than cut wages again."

"Of course, they *would* say that. Now suppose I give *you* a few facts to keep in mind before you listen to Mr. Francis J. Gorman's fine talk any more."

She proceeded to give me these facts as we returned to her automobile and drove homeward through the autumn dusk. Some of her statements in defense of the mill policy were startling and I tried to listen with open mind, hoping that we might agree in the end. In my home town I did not have any good friends to spare and Harriett, especially, I did not wish to lose. And in truth I knew that her attitude toward this trouble, in spite of the fact that she was the mill president's daughter, was remarkably impartial: it was really a pity, I thought, that she could not have displaced some of the salaried executives to whom all Union sympathizers were Communists in need of gallows.

THE trouble had not been stirred up overnight. The Union had been gathering its forces slowly but it was not until the April before this September that we knew how much was happening within our gates. One perfect after-

noon of warm sun and burnished skies the United Textile Workers had staged on Main Street what was probably the greatest labor parade in the history of the South. The line was two miles long. Nearly five thousand workers and their sympathizers marched three abreast. They were led by little Francis J. Gorman, whose light-hearted mood seemed to be shared by only a part of those who followed in his train: some were sullen, some were bored, some were openly contemptuous of the assembled citizenry who gaped in amazement from sidewalks and porches along the way. Many paraders were dressed in their Sunday best—"best" that was not so fine as local observers reported it to be, for the occasional fur pieces, worn fashionably in the warm weather, were cheap imitations and the silk stockings we heard so much about were not without darns. Some of the girls wore high heels and parading was as difficult for them as it was for cripples with their crutches and mothers who carried babies. Past the Elks' Club, past the more prominent Methodist and Baptist churches, past the best homes, the line moved on to the spirited music of a lively band.

The banners of the UTW waved beside the Stars and Stripes.

Huge placards flashed by:

**WE ARE THE UNDESIRABLES
55 HOURS WORK FOR \$13.50 COULD YOU LIVE
ON THAT
DISCHARGED BECAUSE WE JOINED THE UNION
WE WANT AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE
TO OUR EMPLOYERS THAT WE BEAR THEM NO
ILL WILL**

It had been feared by gloomier spectators that there would be a special demonstration in front of Mr. Fitz-

gerald's residence. But the workers did no more than stare at the white house where curtains were drawn as though the family had safeguarded themselves from this tumultuous scene.

Near me on the sidewalk two middle-aged women with flat voices had gossiped cheerfully.

"Poor Mr. Fitzgerald, I know he never thought he'd live to see this day. These common people ought to be ashamed of themselves. Just look how many of those mill girls have got on silk hose! Somebody was tellin' me the other day that they won't buy anything but the best grade hose and a friend of mine who knows a clerk in the School-field store says they buy strawberries in March. And here they are grumblin' about \$13.50 a week. I don't pay my cook but \$3. How much do you pay yours? You do? Well, honey, if the poor whites keep on like this, the next thing we know the niggers will be paradin' around."

"Saints preserve us! But I declare it's awful for these foreign agitators to come stirrin' up trouble in Danville. The police ought to get busy right now."

"You're exactly right. I just can't help thinkin' of Mr. Fitzgerald. He's always been so good to everybody and now it looks like the whole town is fussin' at him. It's not just these laborin' people, either. The stockholders are furious because they didn't get any dividends. They say he ought to have cut salaries long before now."

"Well, he certainly has done some whackin' now. He cut everybody from himself right on down."

"Yes, he used to get \$75,000 and now he just gets \$60,000. Goodness, I can't conceive of that much money!"

"It is a lot of money. But, then, he's a mighty generous man. Of course, I reckon he's been too extravagant, too. You know what they say about his daughter's trousseau, all the finery she bought in New York. They say she

spent thousands on that weddin'. Just like money grew on trees—"

At this point I had left to follow the paraders to Ballou Park where there was to be speech-making by the visitors. I knew what the rest of the dialogue would have been. Every time that trousseau was described by the disgruntled stockholders or the general public its costly magnificence became more and more incredible. Thousands of dollars, they said. The best silk lingerie from Fifth Avenue. Silk chemises and step-ins like movie stars wore. Handkerchiefs that cost ten dollars a piece. And, meanwhile, no dividends for the poor widows whose husbands had seen fit to put their earnings in our local common or preferred. It was true that salaries and wages had been slashed at last and some of the men who made fifteen or twenty thousand would have to be content with less, just as the weavers and doffers and carders must suffer their ten per cent, too. Why single out the fact that a salary of \$60,000 was nothing to kick about? Couldn't Mr. Fitzgerald get that much from another mill any time he pleased and, besides, didn't he give away a large part of his earnings to private and public charities? . . .

Thus, as I hurried toward the park, I reviewed in my mind what had been hear-say along our streets. I wondered fearfully what the outcome of all this trouble would be. Ours was the largest independent mill in the South and if the Union entered these mill gates you might as well say that their biggest battle was won and that other victories would ensue. Danville, so *The Nation* said, was labor's outpost in the South. The Industrial Democracy which Mr. Fitzgerald founded and nursed had been eulogized far and wide as a happy scheme of cooperation between those who hired and those who labored. It seemed now, however, that our little world was less secure. Sadly

I recalled local-history classes and the time we were kept in after school if we did not know that Danville, with its motto of "Danville Does Things," was the birthplace of Nancy Astor, the largest of loose leaf tobacco markets, and, most particularly, the home of one of the greatest cotton mills in the world. . .

The crowd at Ballou Park had been tremendous. In an open space near the reservoir a platform had been erected and upon it were seated Mr. Gorman and his co-workers, a few of the local Union leaders, and, quite ironically, in view of what was to happen later, our Chief of Police, J. Hannibal Martin. I did not recall the name of the minister who dared to ask God's blessing upon this meeting, beseeching Heaven to grant a square deal for all and a victory for the Union, but, whoever he was, he risked his name.

"And God bless Brother Gorman for coming down here to help us in the hour of trouble—"

Brother Gorman arose and stood silently during several moments of thunderous applause. Then, at last, his voice rang forth with undeniable fervor which charmed even a minority of his hearers, who had been slightly suspicious of this "furriner," variously reported to be a Cockney, Irishman, and Jew. If he was nothing else, Gorman was a good orator for his element; he was a persuasive actor and he possessed considerable knowledge of mob psychology; if he had been employed by the mills, he could have made the workers believe they were happy citizens of Industrial Democracy as easily as he convinced them that only by grace of the United Textile Workers could they be led from the bondage of a capitalists' hell.

"A policy of persecution has been installed within the mills in an effort to discourage you and intimidate you," he said, his eyes shining with a sparkle that was part of his

power, his Cockney-American voice glowing with satisfaction. "They want to prevent you from following your rightful inclination to join a Union—"

His glance moved about the crowd as though he were speaking exclusively to each individual in his vast audience. There was a subtle flattery in his approach which increased as he used simple language and workers' slang. Men pressed nearer to the platform. Mothers stuck nipples in babies' mouths and strained to hear. Gum-chewing girls in silk hose tried to understand the fine-sounding words.

"So you've got an Industrial Democracy!" Gorman cried with a significant sneer. "A fine Industrial Democracy with your own Senate and House, your own representatives—"

"Apple sauce!" shouted a man from the crowd and cheers filled the air.

"Apple sauce is right!" Gorman said when the mob grew quiet again. "Well, don't worry, folks, we're going to bury that Industrial Democracy! It's time for a funeral."

4

WITH this April afternoon fresh in our memories it had not come as a great surprise when the strike was called one Monday in September and pickets were stationed beside the closed gates of all our mills. Early in the morning, before I went to my classes to resume the hours of irregular French verbs and the parsing of sentences, I rushed about to get my news. Three o'clock could not come too soon. All day long the U.P. was bombarding my home with wires which my mother received and reported on when I rushed in from school.

Already the *Danville Bee* was alarming with headlines and its columns bewildering in the number of calamitous

rumors and predictions. Going first to the president and then to the Union headquarters at the Hotel Burton, I tried to separate fact from fiction.

Mr. Fitzgerald was visibly upset and spoke less distinctly than ever. I could not understand much of what he said and his deafness, of course, kept him from understanding me. But his prepared statement epitomized all that he wished to say.

"For forty-seven years our company has operated continuously with mutual trust and confidence between employer and employee. The responsibility for this strike and all that it involves upon our employees as well as our community rests upon those who have called it."

Radicalism was fashionable among youths just out of college and I suppose I wanted to believe that the man was deliberately lying; but I felt certain that he was sincere. I tried to persuade myself that I was receiving his defense because I was awed by his position, as a petty bourgeois might very well be. Could it be that I had no mind of my own? Was it true that I accepted people's creeds too readily and did not find out what was what for myself? Suddenly I remembered how mad I had been at a family gathering when a cousin had said to me, "You listen to people just because they are successful. You are liking Russian books now because your goddess, Miss Glasgow, likes them. Next year it will be some other person you're hanging on to. Don't you ever do any thinking for yourself?"

Was there any truth in what my cousin had said?

Certainly, at least, I would do well in this clash between labor and capital to do my own thinking without being swayed by pretty speeches of either party. Because Mr. Fitzgerald, as an executive, had Utopian ideas for his Industrial Democracy and because, as a citizen, he gave to every

beggar at his door, I need not believe too quickly that thousands of workers had left their tasks so Mr. Gorman could draw a salary. . . That was what I thought when I went in the Hotel Burton lobby where the small visitor and his cohorts were as garrulous as Mr. Fitzgerald was reserved. Everybody was talking. A reporter could fill his paper's columns with ease. The press representative for the Union was eloquent.

"The mill company owns the stores in the Village," the amicable cigar-chewer fired away. "The mill company owns the houses. After collections are made, there's hardly anything left in the worker's envelope when pay day comes. In one house four girls sleep in one bed; they make \$9.60 a week and pay \$6 for board. Would you and I like that? No! And neither do four thousand workers!"

The chief's eyes flashed as he interrupted his assistant. Francis J. Gorman was an energetic, jovial, crafty, little man who did not mince his words. He could argue forcefully and it might even be that our citizens would have condemned him a shade less severely if they ever talked to him face-to-face. All they knew about him was what they read in the *Danville Register* and *Bee* and those agencies of enlightenment were not among his admirers. It was the organizer's contention that our press was slightly biased; personally, he would not have given two volumes of our Willie Shands Meacham or G. Tetley for one paragraph of Heywood Broun.

"If this strike is lost in Danville," he said, pausing dramatically while we might weigh his words, "workers may as well stop organizing below the Mason and Dixie line. If we lose here, we lose everywhere. This is the gateway to the South. We cannot lose, I tell you, we cannot lose! I know we have a hard fight ahead of us. Your papers

are owned by a mill lover, and you'll pump us for news, and then you'll distort the facts—"

"Leave that 'you' business out when addressing the local press, Mr. Gorman," I said quite seriously. "Though I was born and raised here, I am not recognized by the *Danville Register and Bee*. They don't admire me much more than they admire you. You know how much that is."

"I apologize most humbly," he said, while everybody laughed at his dismay. "Then, maybe, you'll give *your* papers some *facts*. This is supposed to be a free country and yet a company dismisses its employees merely because they join a union—"

"The Company says the only Union members they've thrown out were those who neglected their jobs in the mills by talking Union during work hours, soliciting members—"

"Of course, you and I know better. The lawful right to join a union has been unlawfully denied. If they'll give us a chance, we'll show that a unionized mill will make things better for employers as much as for employees. But Fitzgerald says he'll not even *speak* to a representative of the United Textile Workers."

It seemed to me that most of my conferences with labor leaders and mill executives were much alike. Mr. Fitzgerald did not like Mr. Gorman and Mr. Gorman did not like Mr. Fitzgerald. How they could ever cooperate in any way, how they could sit together at a table of peace, was more than I could imagine. From the very outset of this siege efforts at conciliation were in vain. The first week Washington had rushed agents to the scene. Mr. Gorman was verbose but Mr. Fitzgerald said simply, "Why come to conciliate? There's *nothing* to conciliate." It was evident that the best of escorts could not get a union

leader into the executive office of our mills. It would take more than Herbert Hoover to make Harry Fitzgerald shake hands with William Green or his ambassador, Francis J. Gorman.

The only government services desired at this time were local and not Federal. The services of policemen were more valuable, it seemed, than all the Department of Labor en masse. If the government wanted to send the army—well, that would be different. Already there were pleas for the Law. Trucks of cotton from North Carolina tried to enter the Village. “Get the hell back, you goddam Tarheel strike-breakers!” cried the pickets and more than one driver shifted his gears in reverse.

An unpopular overseer tried to enter the mills with a group of non-Union workers, including several Negroes; the mission was to save some goods that were in process in the bleachery.

“We got our orders and ain’t nobody gonna pass this here gate,” said a picket.

“Orders from who?” demanded the official, trying to conceal his rage at being ordered by his inferiors.

“Who you think we gets our orders from?” answered the picket who, like so many others, was drunk with power.

The superintendent beckoned to the workers to follow but they hung back timidly. The Negroes were especially reluctant to press their entrance, for they were between the devils on both sides: they were not allowed to work and yet, as “niggers” among “poor whites,” they were looked down upon and not welcomed to this Union which had come to upset the bare existence which gave them at least a measure of peace, if little else.

This was one of the incidents which led to talk of an injunction to keep pickets from the Company’s gates. Al-

ready there was an appeal to John Garland Pollard, a white-haired old gentleman who had been raised from a professorial chair at William and Mary to the governor's chair in Richmond. This entreaty led to further talk of mediation.

"I hereby offer to appoint a committee of mediation," wired the governor. Immediately a reply went back to the prim gray house in Capitol Park. Harry Fitzgerald was not perturbed by governors: "We believe that if you knew the mill situation and the history of our company you would realize that so far as our company and its employees are concerned there is absolutely nothing to mediate."

5

WHILE the big injunction was being concocted, there were little injunctions, too. Late one afternoon, worn out by a long day of teaching and strenuous news-chasing, I stopped at the Fitzgeralds' residence and went to the studio over the big family garage where Harriett labored at her art for more hours than any union would have allowed.

She did not hear me come up the steps and I stood at the top of the stairs for several moments and watched her as she bent over her easel. She was a handsome girl whose intelligence was reflected in her slender face. "Very interesting-looking," people were likely to say because they were at a loss to describe the unusual; and "lovely" or "cute" would never do for Harriett. She was calm, deliberate, and capable of supreme devotion to her work, to a friend, to any object of her faith. I felt that her resourcefulness would not be lost even if time should prove that men like Maurice Sterne were mistaken in saying that she would go far with the art she loved so intensely and worked at so faithfully.

As she pushed back the locks of dark hair that fell over her brow, she looked up and saw me watching her.

"Oh, hello, I didn't hear you come in. Come and see what you think of this."

Was the request perfunctory? What I thought of art did not matter much, I knew. I had been told, good-naturedly enough, that I looked at pictures with a literary and obvious point of view, trying always to see in a picture what was life-like and graphic. It was to be expected that I should have remembered Corot's meadows and cows more than anything else in the Louvre, for I was reminded of some pasture by the Dan and of the Holsteins and Guernseys of my native county. So I had been told.

But I looked at the portrait of a quaint little Negro girl who was envied by all the colored children of Broad Street Bottom when she strutted up to Miss Fitzgerald's to be paid just for sitting still.

"Really I like this ever so much. It looks like her, too — that observation was to be expected from me, wasn't it? I hope it didn't offend you. No joking, though, I do like it. It's not too modern for me to understand it."

"I'm glad you approve," Harriett said, smiling with honest good humor, since she was frank but never sarcastic. Her deep, quiet voice was as arresting as her natural poise. "How's the public school system? And Soviet Russia?"

"The American public school system in this vicinity is the same. That goes without saying. Weary spinsters and sad-faced males trying to make future presidents out of every mother's baby, tedious meetings to decide whether we shall impart our meagre bit of knowledge by the John Doe System of Pedagogy or the Susie Brown Modern Method of Public School Instruction for Morons in Masses. Oh, well, you know. As for Soviet Russia — which means the strike, I trust — the latest news is that an injunction is

being sworn out to keep pickets from preventing entrance to the mills."

"So I've heard. But maybe I know more strike news today than you do. There's another little injunction under way—an injunction to keep high school teachers from dealing in labor disputes."

She put down her work to view a listener who was perceptibly perturbed by her news.

"What do you mean?" I said impatiently.

"Just this—"

The story was laid before me. A member of the School Board had come to Mr. Fitzgerald in great alarm to report that I was in alliance with the foreign agitators and was plotting with them against the mills. It was his duty to report this and to take prompt action, not only as a School Board official but as a friend of the Company. It had been doubted before that I was fit to teach the young and now, in this hour of trial, I had shown that the doubters were right.

"What did your father say?" I stammered, trying to be amused instead of sick with the same kind of disgust I had felt when subjected to a diagnosis of my attitude toward the Superintendent's Deity. "What in the world did Mr. Fitzgerald say?"

"Really I think Papa was more entertained than anything else. Certainly he wasn't worried at all. He asked for evidence to back the charges."

"And what, may I ask, was the evidence?"

"You were seen talking to Mr. Gorman in the Hotel Burton lobby in broad daylight, in public. You looked very serious and intent. In short, you looked just like a traitor."

"God help me. I'm guilty, am I not?"

"I suppose you are. It's too funny the way people get

frightened. Papa is none too crazy about this Union crowd, as you pretty well know. But he didn't hesitate in saying you were reporting the strike and that, as a reporter, you would have occasion to talk to the Union people as well as to spokesmen for the Company. He tried to smooth things over."

"That was certainly decent of your father. Did he have any success?"

"A certain amount, I should say. But it was felt that Papa should have been more concerned and that he should not trust you so far."

"Your father failed to appreciate a performance of Christian duty. Oh, hell, but I hate this kind of thing! And it's always turning up. It gets to parents and then to children who can't help themselves. Teachers would get along much better with pupils if adults showed any pretense of intelligence. Tell me, what shall I do? Ignore it? Or shall I confront the enemy, my latest and most energetic enemy?"

Harriett was composed. She was far more tolerant than I was and condoned things which I harbored in a memory that was already, after not much more than twenty years of use, entirely too full of what was more bitter than sweet.

"If you like, suppose we go to his house together and you might explain to him that a reporter is not always as dangerous as he thinks—"

So she put away her paints and turned off the light in the studio. We went downstairs, out of the garage, and up the alley along the privet hedge.

The dutiful citizen lived a short distance away in an apartment house which I had passed every day without noticing it, being unaware that its occupant cared whether I lived or died, never thinking *he* had been there all the time doing his Christian duties.

He came to the door, greeted Harriet with appropriate effusions, and acknowledged me of necessity because I stood beside her.

"Won't you come in and have a seat?" he invited, making a half-hearted gesture toward the comfortable living-room where a wood fire burned cheerfully, much to my surprise since I was looking for a cold, dark house to suit its master. What, I wondered, was life really like in the home of this Presbyterian school trustee, this solemn gentleman who wore upon his middle-aged and hawkish face a lean, ascetic look which was too easily associated with eyes that did not look so very straight ahead. . .

"We can't stay," Harriet said, turning toward me. That was my cue and I took the stage. The scene was brief.

"I don't think you could have understood my position as a reporter, sir. It's my job to find out what both sides do in this strike and to pass on what I learn to the public. It's the public's place to decide who is right and who is wrong, that's not my place. Naturally I must talk to Mr. Gorman as much as to Mr. Fitzgerald—"

"Well, I didn't know *what* to think when I saw you talking to *those people* down there. You won't see any other Danville folks associating with them. And you being a school teacher—"

"The Superintendent gave me his permission to report the strike. And, really, I don't see what it is to you—I mean I don't see why you should worry. If the Superintendent and Mr. Fitzgerald understand—"

"He's perfectly harmless," Harriett laughed, designating me with a nod.

"I'm glad to get the matter straight," said the school trustee. "I appreciate you coming to explain the situation. You see—uh—Mr. Fitzgerald spoke a good word for you but I'm glad you came to defend yourself."

He was stiff and stern ; he knew he could not have been wrong and he was safely aloof. Harriett's tolerant affection for the human species seemed to bear him along with the rest of us and I suppose she could have talked to him quietly for a longer time. I could not relax. I could hardly breathe until the door of that house was closed behind me.

"Sometimes we have to swallow a hell of a lot to earn a salary here," I said. Then, looking at my friend, I remembered that she had never needed to earn a salary. How could she know what I meant? Unless you had money to live on, I was trying to say, you might as well keep many opinions to yourself, tightly sealed in the inner mind which was essential for any kind of peace. It was all very well for a rich woman, who had heard of some of my troubles, to say, "At least they put you in distinguished company!" Company, distinguished or undistinguished, must have money to live. And what if the authorities should fire me?

6

THE hours spent in reporting the strike were interesting but they were disheartening, too. Teaching was whatever you might suppose teaching in an average Southern public school to be. My time at our rambling white house behind the elms and oaks was what came nearest to being worth while. When I had an afternoon free, my mother and I, aided occasionally by one of those unappreciated Negroes who work in Southern ladies' gardens for fifteen or twenty cents an hour and left-overs from dinner, planted the serpentine borders that edged a new lawn with flowering locusts at one end and a giant oak at the other.

"I know people think we can't afford this garden," Mother would observe, speaking with the incorrigibly broad "a" which made her and her four sisters seem different in the opinion of persons who were not acquainted with their James River ways. "But we haven't spent much, have we? Most of the roses came from slips people gave me to put under glass jars. That boxwood was rooted from a piece I snatched off Grandpa Lewis's grave when I was in Charles City. We've spent a lot of time and work—but not much money."

Mother could use her hoe almost as well as the Negroes or I could and she had what we called green fingers. Whatever she stuck in the ground seemed to flourish, for she was one of those natural gardeners whose love of raising plants is born in them rather than acquired. We worked peacefully until she wanted to place clumps of red flowers in beds of every color.

"Keeping red to itself like a leper is just a new-fangled notion," she said. Neither of us gave in; I had the same incomparable determination to do my own way; there could be little compromise. She planted red verbenas near all the pink and yellow blossoms and I moved them when she was unaware. Red flowers in our garden were constant travelers.

Sometimes Mother became tired and lay down on one of the beach chairs under the grape arbor. The air of October was fragrant with the odor of heliotrope and petunias and lavender; the noises of the street did not reach the quiet of this small haven walled by shrubs and trees. Mother lay still and for a long while we did not talk. Intently, and with some detachment, I studied her in my mind. Not just the reclining figure—not just the clear blue eyes and the auburn hair turning gray and the face which was pale enough to need a touch of rouge she

scorned when spotted on my sister's cheeks—but an adventurer who had withstood so much that I should not have blamed her if she stuck to an easy chair for the rest of her days. We fussed because her daily nap lasted from two to three and nothing short of a catastrophe might disturb her during that hour; but, really, if the naps had been much longer and more frequent, her right should not have been questioned. She had worked hard. She had suffered endless struggles.

After the Surrender, people along the James River were very poor and if the father of the house could not provide for his daughters their only recourse was to sit and to pine or, if worse came to worst, school-teaching was reasonably genteel. But other labor, except, perhaps, a little fancy work, God forbid! And at such an early age my mother had begun to stray. When the young people of Charles City County dared one autumn evening of the early nineties to stage a corn-shucking bee, how surprised her sisters had been and how appalled my grandmother was when Mother shucked ten barrels and captured all the laurels of the day. My grandmother belonged to a traditional school of Virginia ladies who were supposed to be so modest that they never allowed their husbands to see their bare feet and so retiring that they shed tears at the thought of a well-born girl being engaged in the work of the world. If my good grandmother had lived long enough, she would have found the example of porch-rocking and piano-playing disgracefully ignored and many other precepts set aside.

The corn peg which spoke for my mother's early victory was carefully preserved in our home. Whenever I saw it I thought that there were no words to describe the labors accomplished since that October corn-shucking so many years ago: the dancing classes, the dairy, the pickle-making, the paying guests, the antique collecting, the endless

schemes a clever woman had thought of to make money, not for herself, but for her sons and daughters.

"Mother," I said now, interrupting her reveries, "I reckon you can't sit in this garden without thinking how it used to look when there were stables and horse troughs down there where the weeping willows are now. God only knows how hard you and Father worked. But Father had his hunting, his horses, and later, of course, golf. I never felt that you had much but work. Oh, yes, you read and saw your friends and enjoyed flowers, but mostly there was just work."

"Don't you know most mothers are willing to make sacrifices to give their children the best education possible?"

"I'm not so sure. You forget about all the empty-headed mothers we know who think more of getting in local society than they do of their children's education. I don't believe for a minute that *most* mothers, especially if they were untrained as you were, would have done so much or reached so high. I know most parents in strained circumstances would have been content with less. You had to have the best schools in this part of the country. We had to be graduates and then post graduates. You demanded a lot of us because you demanded so much of yourselves. Good heavens, Mother, when we thought of what our going to school cost you in hard work, no wonder we felt disgraced if we missed the Honor Roll by a fraction of a point."

"I know I was a tyrant," Mother smiled. "But it's too late to make me over now. Wait till you have children of your own and you'll see how difficult it is to know what to do."

"One thing is certain. I shall never do so much."

"Oh, yes, you will. I was willing to do any amount of

saving and stinting to send my daughter to Sweet Briar and to send you boys to the University. No doubt you'll worry yourselves old before your time sending your children there—or maybe you'll be more ambitious and cast your eyes toward Oxford or Cambridge—for that's the way it goes."

"Not so sure," I said and my gaze wandered back to the drooping willows where, a decade before, had stood the stable in which my father (before and after his business hours), my brother, and the hired man, had filled the tall pails while the Guernseys jerked at their stanchions and fretfully swished their tails. It all came back as clear as yesterday.

When the warm milk was brought up the back steps Mother was waiting at the door and it was she who superintended or actually did the straining and cooling and bottling. Friends and relatives were glad to buy our fresh, scrupulously tended milk which was delivered at their doorsteps by none other than my most unwilling self. From grammar school days until the time I became an *important senior* in high school it was my sad fate to be condemned to the life of a milk-boy. It seemed to me that I was the most unfortunate of all human beings, the child of cruel parents. I read *David Copperfield* and felt that the troubles of Dickens were mild compared to mine. Once, before high school days, an extra burden was placed upon me. I was told to stop by my aunt's house on the way from school and to get the table scraps which she was saving for our newly acquired flock of Rhode Island Reds. Walking up Main Street with a covered basket, while giggling little girls cried "Trash boy! trash boy! smelly little trash boy!", had seemed too humiliating to be borne. At that time Miss Maggie Brown and Miss Kate Toot were reaching me at Sunday School and I knew the Collects and

the Catechism and I put money in my Mite box during Lent but sometimes I hated God and was quite certain that He hated me in turn and took advantage of me because He could do anything He pleased.

And when I became a senior in high school, omniscient, more sophisticated than I could ever hope to be again, to think that I was still made to deliver pints and quarts of sweet milk before school and to deliver the empty bottles in the afternoon when everyone could see me in the act! What a cruel heritage this was that made me milk-boy and driver of cows, for while other high school seniors lay abed at six-thirty in the morning, I was driving Guernseys and Holsteins out to our rented pasture in Niggertown where they grazed upon tender clover and thick-tufted grass. Trudging bitterly behind those slow-moving cattle, I sought refuge in dreams, dreams of a great musician or a great artist or a great poet, dreams in which I returned to this little town resplendent with wealth and fame, so famous in fact that people would say, "Just think, once he used to set a quart of buttermilk at my Mama's door every Saturday."

Just about that time a tail would swish upward and my feet came unromantically back to earth as I walked in new-laid dung.

O cruel world! O hideous town!

Many times I went homeward and rushed into the white house to throw myself upon my bed in despair, cursing the day I entered so ignominiously into this vale of tears. It never occurred to me that my parents worked many times as hard as I did or that my education might be paid for by the quarts and pints, which I regarded as mortal enemies, thrust upon me by parents who seemed to have no hearts for their very own.

"God only knows how I hated that dairy," I said aloud

now to my mother, who laughed as I did to think that the little comedies of yesterday could have been so serious and so real.

7

AFTER supper, if Mother did not go to my aunts' houses, those four clannish ladies were likely to come up our brick walk between the scraggly box. The slightest excuse would cause a convention of the five sisters. If one was feeling poorly, the other four had to nurse her. If one was going away for as much as a day, the other four made farewell visits which ended with much kissing of turned cheeks and suitably affectionate embraces. If one had a birthday, the other four came to celebrate. Sometimes the excuses were rather flimsy. On Thursday afternoons Mother said, "This afternoon we're going after chickens and eggs. They're selling cheap at Ringgold." *We*, needless to say, meant the closed corporation of herself and the other four *girls*, as she termed the rest of this quintet.

"But, Mother," I said perversely, "considering the gas you buy to go ten or twelve miles in the country, it would be much cheaper to call the grocer."

She never admitted that Chicken and Egg Thursdays were adored because she and the sisters squeezed into one automobile and rode away, laughing and talking and commiserating among themselves. What was said during those rides could be imagined but never known. Only when we drew up rockers on the porch after supper could I join the gatherings which brought me such endless delight.

The oldest of the aunts settled herself in her chair and viewed me with glee as I hung intent upon every word she spoke.

"I know what you're up to, you rascal. You're just waiting to put me in your crazy notebook. I've heard

about that notebook. See if I care though! Put everything about my old fat self and see if I care! Go right ahead. Your mother may object but I—"

Her voice was soft and pleasant. Listening to her and half-listening at the same time to my mother and the youngest aunts on the other side of the porch, I knew why so many people's voices in New York grated so dreadfully on my nerves and why the flat, careless speech of many Southerners was always noticed. How pretty she was as she sat there chattering and smiling! She was lovelier as she grew older: I saw the lights in her gray hair, the radiance of her large brown eyes, the serene expression of her well-shaped face. It would be fine, I thought, if more people could grow old as charmingly.

"May I even tell about the false teeth?" I asked, causing Father, who was a curious mixture of sprightliness and gravity, to give me the stern look of disapproval which I had received just as often after becoming twenty-one as before.

"Tell all about the teeth," she said, chuckling gaily. "Big horse teeth, little baby teeth, temporary teeth, musical teeth, all of them. I don't care a rap, even if your father does think I'm a terrible woman."

This interest in artificial masticating devices irked the depths of Father's soul. But he could never have sh-sh-shd my oldest aunt. Her performance was inevitable. While Father twitched and fidgeted in indignation, I laughed until, literally and truly, I rolled upon the floor in a paroxysm of uncontrollable mirth.

The imitations were perfect. The victims were townspeople who had acquired their teeth, those who were undergoing the torturous process of acquiring them, and those who had no chewing facilities other than their gums. Various little noises and sounds were readily identified. A

venerable widow, for instance, ever since suffering the change, was unable to pronounce any word containing an "s" without whistling shrilly as a bird: all during solemn moments of the Morning Service the worshipers around her were diverted by something like this, "Give us-s-s this-s-s-s day our daily bread. And forgive us-s-s-s our tres-s-s-s-pass-s-es-s-s," and thus, on and on, until the prayer of St. Chrysostom was painfully accomplished. The widow was no less to be pitied than certain elderly citizens, several of whom had been noted for their grave deportment and solemn ways, who had purchased sets which were smaller than their originals and had caused the owners to return to the language of childhood. The baby talk of dignitaries, as revealed by my oldest aunt, would have made the victims weep from shame.

Father was chafed by the show. *She* had *hers*, too, and had lived on milk toast and soups as long as *he* had and he could not understand her pleasure in this indelicate humor. He longed for the end. I never met his glance, for he recalled only too well the time I came in his room to talk to him and he answered with funny little bird talk, having overlooked the fact that he was not fully equipped. We never referred to that calamity but this hilarious performance on the front porch was a cruel reminder and, if I had been mean enough to tell, he would have been added jubilantly to the victims.

"Well, it comes to all of us," the soloist said at length with a humorous sigh.

"Oh, no, it doesn't," snapped the next to the oldest aunt from her straight chair in the middle of the semicircle. "I've got everything the Lord gave me, teeth, tonsils, appendix, every last thing."

Now, as the conversation swerved to loftier topics of church affairs, invalids, and second mortgages on Main

Street homes, I moved my foot-stool to a point from which I could study the character of a lady with sharp features, keen brown eyes, and wavy gray hair. This was the second and most straightforward member of this corporation which my oldest aunt ruled like an easy-going queen.

"Why don't you come to church more often?" she said swiftly, fastening upon me a formidable glare.

"I have so little time and, anyway—"

"You have plenty of time to do what suits your taste. You have plenty of time to waste on all sorts of books. I'll bet you've been reading some more books by that Peterkin woman and such—"

"Mrs. Peterkin is one of the people I like best. Don't say anything about her character, because I won't listen."

"Well, anyway, you could come to church if you wanted to. You don't support the church, so you can't except the church to support you. Who's going to bury you?"

"Really, I haven't made any plans."

"Well, I'll tell you. You'll have a pauper's funeral. You never lift your finger for Epiphany so you can't expect Epiphany to put you away in Green Hill as fine as a Vestryman. I don't know what the country is coming to, anyway. Do you know you ought to give a tenth to your church? The Bible says you've got to tithe."

Nobody resented her frankness. She was a law unto herself: only the oldest aunt could rebuke her and even the queen handled her with care. She would flay you alive with words and, then, as soon as you were sick for as much as a day, she arrived somewhat disdainfully and deposited a bag of grapefruit or a bowl of wine jelly on the table by your bed. "Your mother looks worn to a frazzle," she would observe. "How long are you going to lie in that bed?"

me how, either because her candor was a family trait or because it was felt that a drab career is supposed like one slightly caustic, she was conceded the privilege of speaking and acting as she chose. She asked us why, whom, where, and when we were going to certain places; how little or how much money we earned and so on; whether we knew that it was bad to have riches when we ourselves were as poor as Job's turkey.

Her probing was incessant and yet for us there was no comeback, no return. So frequently did she slip out in the morning, never telling anyone where she was going, that one of the young sisters accused her good-naturedly of leading a double life; she grinned at this but she did not say where she went. Her financial status was a mystery,

"I can't afford to ride a street car, she would say, or, I don't know how I'll pay my taxes, or, This is the fifth time for this coat but I can hardly buy coal. Her affairs were inscrutable: she was one of those people who want accounts of other lives but keep their own secrets well concealed. It seemed strange that she should be one of the sisters at all since she was always an independent figure, composing herself hardly ever, whereas the rest of the people were one mind and heart. One of the rare occasions when I heard her commit herself to any extent was when some ladies were praising the rich interests of the town life. She listened to the Pollyannas as long as she could and then she said, "I'm glad to know you're all happy. I'm bored a good part of every day, bored to death."

Whatever one said about her was always ended by saying "She's as good as gold." And that was as true as it could be about anyone. Behind her mask and bluff she was lovable, fine, and marvelously honest. . .

Her talk flowed on. Now Mother was leading in a

well-known vein: "No, indeed, I'm not going to worry myself about my daughters' smoking after they come of age. But that's not going to keep me from thinking and knowing it's an awful habit—and *I don't care who is in the tobacco business.*" I looked around to see that several of those present were concerned but they were taking it mildly because it came from the family. "There's everything against it and nothing for it. I can look at any young girl and tell you right off whether she smokes— What would our parents have thought of young Virginia girls soiling their lips?"

Moving my seat again, this time to the swing near the younger aunts, I realized that there were little unions within the larger union. The two youngest aunts were inseparable; you never saw one without the other; they were about the same size and, except for the fact that one was darker than the other, they might have been thought of as twins. They taught in the same Virginia school, shared a house and automobile, divided all expenses, and, if ever they fussed, nobody knew about it except themselves.

When I sat by them I was sure of hearing something about our public schools which, according to the Jefferson tradition, were so liberal and free. What did I hear? All that my young aunts retained of the James River pattern for womanhood was a gentle manner, the soft voices and the very broad "a." Teaching had not prevented them from reading and thinking. They dared to say what they chose and, I daresay, if they had not been exceptionally fine teachers, they would have been disposed of as were so many other liberal-minded persons who strayed into our standardized public school system which still seemed to regard Administrators and a certain type of Baptist deacon as one and the same. Their mortal enemies were not chil-

dren opposed to learning but System, Methods, and the Guardianship of Public Morals.

They liked to tell about a friend who was so learned and capable that she could defy certain gentlemen as though she had never heard of Servants of the State.

"The Board tells her that she must use certain books and follow certain prescribed methods and outlines. If she thinks the rules antiquated and useless, she pipes right up and says she'll use the best books she can find and teach as she sees fit. If anybody else defied the gentlemen, they'd be dumbfounded, but what can they do with a high school teacher who has lived with French people and been honored by the French government for her mastery of the language?"

"She is one in a thousand, though," I said, thinking of the "French" pedagogs I knew, who followed the Board rules scrupulously, murdering their subject in the process. "So many teachers I know have no opinion of their own and, if they did have any, they wouldn't want the public to know they did."

"If you are going on with teaching," said the dark-haired aunt, who was considered to be witty and handsome, "you must go into college work. But I hope you won't be a teacher. What was it that Willa Cather said about our profession?"

"I believe she said it was for the 'phlegmatic,'" answered my other young aunt who read widely and remembered what she read. "Wait a minute, what's that your mother is saying over there?"

Mother was holding the center of the stage now. Her voice rang forth clearly as everyone became silent and still. The autumn moon had risen high over the elms. It was becoming a little chilly for us to be out-of-doors and the ruler of the clan had moved to the edge of her chair when

this emphatic speech (which might have seemed commonplace enough to the world-at-large) arrested the attention of everyone as though a strange voice had been discovered all of a sudden in the bosom of the family.

"Maybe the organizers are stirring up trouble but maybe there was already some trouble. Have you ever looked at some of our people who have spent their youth working from dark till dark? Have you ever seen humped shoulders, caved-in chests, ghastly faces? Go out some afternoon at five-thirty and watch the workers creep back to those little cottages with no bathrooms on the other side of the railroad tracks. Whenever we have visitors in town, it's considered entertaining to take them on a tour of the mills. It hurts me to go inside a mill."

There was a look of bewilderment from one corner and a smile of indulgence from another.

"All my fine educated children have been putting notions in my wife's head," Father spoke up rather half-heartedly. "They brought a lot of bright ideas from their professors and are putting them off on their mother."

"I'd like to see you or anybody else put any ideas off on Mother, if she didn't honestly believe them," I retorted hotly.

"Thank you, Son," Mother said, smiling. "I don't get too many compliments."

One Sunday, many years before this meeting on the porch, at a time when I was wearing Windsor ties and knee breeches, Mother had suddenly jerked me out of our pew at her beloved Epiphany in the middle of an elderly minister's sermon. Everyone thought she was ill and several Episcopalians followed us into the vestibule to offer assistance. I was frightened. The scene stayed in my mind but I had to grow older by a number of seasons

before I could understand Mother's explanation of our abrupt departure from the House of God.

"But what did he say that made you so mad, Mother?"

"He counted all our wealth and blessings—and he thanked God for the glory and magnificence of our mills. You can't imagine what the mills were then. Little children were working at night and there were many abuses. I can't see the glory and magnificence too clearly now. So you can imagine how I felt at the time of that sermon."

8

AND now the glory and magnificence of the mills was being contested with a vengeance. Francis J. Gorman and his helper from the National Trade Women's League were keeping their pickets busy. The energetic, voluble little man did not seem to be perturbed in the least when stockholders stated that their plant would close its doors until eternity before any Union representative entered its portals. Nor was he visibly upset when we told him that some local people had been impressed by a news dispatch from Tennessee where an officer of the UTW had been taken from his office and flogged by a patriotic mob. With commissaries to be opened, campaigns to be planned, new recruits to be sought, the general had no time to think of anything that might keep him from winning his war.

"Young man, did you know that Communists have been hired by the mills to fight us? That workers have been imported from Gastonia to destroy the legitimate trade union movement by breaking the strike? Did you know your honorable home town papers, the *Register* that doesn't register and the *Bee* that stings, are sold body and soul to the mills?"

Such things could not be proved sufficiently in black and white and all a reporter could send to his ever-demanding boss were endless wires summarizing whatever he could see and hear. With so many facts at hand it was not necessary to resort to speculation.

At the Police Court there was a constant pageant. Our mayor was Captain Harry Wooding. The captain was a national figure, since his picture had been in the *New York Times* and all the big papers because he was nearly ninety and had been a mayor longer than any man in the country; he was still spry enough to attend church services and Prayer Meeting, resourceful enough to eat beefsteak in spite of the fact that he was without a single tooth, energetic enough to deliver many patriotic orations and to walk as far or farther than Miss Toaxie or Miss Empsie or any of his children. But, with all that, we were not surprised when the outsiders said Mayor Wooding was too old to be worried with a strike. He came downtown only for the morning hours and everybody wanted him to find things pleasant; it was nice for him to sit in his big office in the new Municipal Building, smoking a quantity of cigars and chatting with his friends about the Confederacy.

We had a police justice to bother with details that fell upon mayors in other towns. We had Mayor Wooding for ceremonies and Police Justice Carter for business. The strike came in the latter category, so the offenders in this fray were ushered into Charlie Carter's court-room within the shadows of the jail.

There were the men accused of distributing utterances tending to violence or casting reflection upon the good names of Harry Fitzgerald or other officials. One man denied that he had said, "You've got to win even if you have to blow the damn thing up," but he got a \$50 fine

and three months as a warning. One large group of strikers was charged with jeering at fellow-workers who insisted upon entering the gates when the whistles blew. Mrs. Kate Peace, an ardent Unionite, was arrested but not fined for "barking like a dog" at non-Union girls. A mob charged with parading at night and halting ominously before certain houses was released after a solemn avowal that "we was only takin' a walk before goin' to bed." A mother on strike was said to have followed her daughter up the road, beating tin pans and buckets to humiliate the girl because she was a scab. A striker was charged with thumbing his nose at women bound for work. Thirty-one men were fined \$25 and given thirty days for throwing rocks at strike-breakers and because "they did riotously and tumultuously assemble together for the purpose of violating the law and committing unlawful acts and having so assembled did disturb the peace and dignity of the commonwealth."

The court-room would have been an even busier place if many whose presence was desired had not eluded the hands of law. Missing were those who slit tires or hurled pop bottles and bricks. Missing were night riders who took Negro scabs from their shanties *to learn them a lesson*. Missing were those who destroyed the picture of Clifford J. Parrott, speaker of the mills' House of Representatives and past great sachem of Virginia Red Men. Missing were many who awoke Danville with the noise of dynamite which seemed to be thrown so as to destroy property without taking the lives of human beings: Pentecostal Holiness Church, for instance, (which was the meeting-place of certain worshippers who believed that Union members could not enter Beulah Land) was wrecked while empty, physically inconveniencing nobody except J. O. Thomas, the man next door, who landed on the floor with

his radio on top of him after a violent blast shook the sacred walls.

When one thought of Gastonia it might seem that our strike was tranquil indeed. It had been dragging on for several months now and not a life had been lost. But more scabs were getting by the picket lines, the beans from the commissary were not too plentiful, and there was some basis for the fear that a catastrophe was around the corner. One morning the pickets halted street cars bearing workers and turned them back; strike-breakers were chased to their homes; officials were publicly ridiculed as they rode through the streets. Local police had many recruits in their ranks, pick-ups from pool room loafers and permanent unemployed, but they were not enough to calm the fears of citizens who clamored for help from Richmond.

The poor old governor was bombarded with demands for troops. One morning the picketing became especially alarming and, although extra rookies were sworn in by the dozen, people said it looked like the riot of 1883 come to life save that the enemy was a striker instead of a Negro. Chief Martin hurled bombs of tear gas when persistent cat-calls greeted his presence in the mob and then the arrests were wholesale.

That afternoon I went to Union headquarters and found little Mr. Gorman garrulous, in spite of rage which would have made most people incoherent, if not speechless.

But Gorman could talk even when he was most fox-like and unpredictable in his movements. His eyes flashed, a contemptuous sneer crossed his face which, for once, was not beaming with optimism and hope. He turned to me and my omnipresent pad and pencil.

"Tell your papers the Danville police are a bunch of rookies. That exhibition this morning was typical mill

village, small town police work, a combination of bowing the knee and losing the head."

"You certainly say some ugly things about the old home town," I said flippantly, but this was no time for joking and the leader of the UTW continued his discourse by reading his statement for the press.

"The throwing of the gas bombs was as needless as were the bayonets that glistened in the headlights of the early autos. What a spectacle! I know the danger of green men stalking around for the first time with a badge of authority on their breasts and a rifle in their hands. Police are not kings or czars. . ."

"Well, I'm afraid Danville won't agree with you, Mr. Gorman. Have you read the *Bee*?"

A sour look told me that the journal had been read. Danville's papers, part of the Democratic inheritance of our Buddie James, alumnus of several colleges and man about town, were taking Gorman for a daily ride. There had been a number of hot encounters between the labor chief and Buddie's subordinates, G. Tetley and Willie Shands Meacham. Gorman called the *Bee* a strike-breaking agency. That complacent organ retorted thus, "If the human relationship in Southern industry is to be improved by mass action, it will be accomplished best through the leadership of men who know the South and its traditions," a remark which all critics from above the Mason and Dixon line customarily received. "The fatuous broadside has made no dent upon our hive."

G. Tetley thereafter exchanged physical as well as verbal blows with Gorman, and Willie Shands Meacham, who was rather big and heftty, engaged in a little match with Danville's unwelcome guest which sounded spectacular as re-

ported in the next morning's paper by the larger half of the match.

The lack of admiration felt by our papers for Gorman was, as he well knew, shared by a majority of the citizens who agreed with Mr. Fitzgerald when he broke his Coolidge-like silence to speak bitterly of "gangsters" who should not have been allowed to remain overnight after they had "preached a gospel of hate" and "concocted diabolical schemes to ruin the good people of a community." What was most feared were the diabolical schemes the small man was said to be concocting during the closed meetings he had with strikers in his room at the Hotel Burton. Wild rumors spread terror: everybody *heard* that such and such a tragedy was on its way. People had phoned Mr. Fitzgerald that his life was in danger so I was not surprised, when I went to see Harriett one evening, to discover that a machine gun was concealed behind the shrubbery in the front yard and that the spacious white house was well guarded by police who, when midnight came, were rewarded by nourishment from the Fitzgeralds' kitchen where Southern cooking was as successful as ever, despite the protest of labor leaders (who were boarding at the Hotel Burton where the best meals in town were served) that Mr. Fitzgerald ate turkey and ham while his workers ate turnips and grits.

All in all it was apparent that our once peaceful little town was beset now by a well-developed case of sinking in the shoes.

Finally the heart of Virginia's venerable governor softened and his militia, 887 officers and men, armed for battle, rode imperiously across the Dan. With the arrival of those troops most of Danville's citizens and all her capitalists breathed sighs of relief and began to talk of victory.

9

NEITHER side would grant an inch. The mill said to let come what may, bombing, death, every evil of the enemy, but a labor union would never be recognized within its doors. The strike leaders said, "We'll stay out till hell freezes over unless we get our rights. We're tired of cruelty from Boss Men, overwork, underpay, denial of the right to organize."

Listening to these ultimatums, one wondered who would be the first to swallow words. . .

Those who longed for a settlement turned hopefully from one visitor to another for panaceas and magic cures.

President Herbert Hoover passed through town on his way back to the White House after delivering an oration at the King's Mountain Sesqui-Centennial. When his train stopped at the Southern station he was greeted by a fair-sized crowd who wanted a glimpse of the one man who, they believed, might bring the trouble to an end.

The president appeared on the platform and bowed very politely for a man who was in a town where Republicans suffered especial disesteem.

"How's the strike getting on?"

"Pretty quiet," said a striker in overalls who pushed his way to the front as a self-appointed spokesman for a group who were mostly too awed by the sight of a president in the flesh, and a Republican president at that, to have uttered a word if their lives depended upon it.

"Hope it can be settled," said President Hoover.

With that utterance the chief executive seemed to become more of a man, a little less distant and aloof. Our spokesman moved nearer to his superior's person, and lifted his Southern laborer's voice to tell a story of hardship and oppression inside the textile plants along the Dan. The

account was tainted by a kind of bitterness which causes immediate panic in the mind of every well-fed conservative. It was even a slightly radical account and there was no cause for surprise when the speaker was silenced by a restraining gesture of the presidential hand.

"The way to win all those things you men want is to keep the peace and not through violence," Mr. Hoover said with a tone of warning. Then he bowed again and retreated into his Pullman. What some of those workers said when he was gone could not have been repeated.

The president's brief tarry may have been inconsequential—but no more so than the visits of certain ambassadors of a different school of thought. Sherwood Anderson, for instance, came down from Marion and sauntered about Main Street speaking of the Union's rights while escorted by representatives of the *Register* and *Bee* who, as it has been said before, were not among those whom the Union cherished. By allying himself with the local journalists Anderson, liberal as he may have been to the *New Republic* that sent him, was off on the wrong foot from the first step of his mission of peace. In addition, his hair was longer and bushier than that of most Danvillians, making him seem a little "different" and "peculiar" and causing suspicion among the workers in spite of the high recommendation the visitor received from Gorman and his ever-faithful cohort, Miss Matilda Lindsey. Sherwood Anderson, they explained to the gaping throng, was a great writer and friend of labor. The "great writer" was slightly wasted. The strikers knew just about as much concerning Sherwood Anderson, author, as they knew about Einstein or the music of Debussy; even among the esteemed citizens whom I questioned there were few who placed the name. Only one person said that he had read Anderson's work and

that was Willie Shands Meacham, our one intellectual, who had a speaking acquaintance with the titles, if not the contents, of every great liberal from the Greeks on down the ages. How Willie managed to disapprove of the Union and to admire Sherwood Anderson's doctrines at the same time was not explained but, as Willie once said to me, celebrity-chasing could bring out inconsistencies in the best of us.

It was rather pathetic when Anderson arose in the Union hall that evening to address a crowd who watched him with open mouths and glassy eyes as though he might have been the Man from Mars instead of a reporter for the *New Republic*. He seemed painfully earnest and what he said might have been sensible for the right audience but, addressing the Danville chapter of the UTW, he was sadly out of place. Only rare fragments of his speech were intelligible to the workers.

"I am sympathetic with your cause and I hope to God you will win. I am a writer and not a speaker. I came here in the hope that I might be able to write something that would bring your situation to the attention of the country. I doubt if I can say anything that will be really helpful at this juncture. I don't know enough about the case yet. . ."

The drift of that much could be caught. But, then, there came a baffling note which carried many minds astray.

"There is something that we have in common and that is that we are all Virginians," said the voice with an accent that was as Middle Western as *Winesburg, Ohio*.

"He ain't no Virginian," sneered a weaver who was standing by me at the back of the hall. "He looks like a furriner to me."

"Why, no, I believe he's from Ohio or Illinois or somewhere like that, but he's bought some newspapers at Marion and makes his home there."

"Anyways, I knowed he won't no born an' raised Virginian."

"You may be right about that," I assented and then gave my attention again to the speech.

"Virginia has a tradition of freedom and right that makes me ashamed to know there are men in Virginia who are not willing to grant you your rights and deal with you fairly—"

Such remarks were more intelligible to the audience than a discussion of the Worker's Relation to the Machine which might as well have been in Greek as far as most of the textile laborers were concerned. The truth was, in summary, that when Sherwood Anderson finished his honest and well-intentioned speech and started back to Marion to write his article for the *New Republic*, it was generally felt that he was no more helpful in the hour of need than Herbert Hoover.

10

THE Virginian from the Middle West was remembered in Danville no longer than the omniscient professors who came from every direction to offer an Academic Approach to Industrial Maladjustment. This was an outstanding strike in the history of American labor. After news was published that it was costing the Union \$1000 a day to feed the strikers and the state \$4000 a day to keep the troops, after two girls from the mills appeared before the assembled American Federation of Labor in Boston and plead that "the cry of babes and moanin' of mothers for food can be heard in the Sunny South," it might have been expected

that contributions from philanthropic liberals would not be the only fruits of such publicity. From Yale, from Harvard, from Columbia, from Johns Hopkins, the doctors of philosophy came to contribute the wisdom of their respective "fields"—Economics, Sociology, and anything in a curriculum remotely associated with capital and labor. No Southern town without a university ever attracted so many pedagogs at once. A reporter could hardly keep them straight and by the time he did get them under control the newspapers would be weary of their words and ask for livelier news.

One day when everything had been peaceful along the picket line, I decided that I might as well make a story out of a studious-looking gentleman from Yale who was making a "survey" during a brief tarry in our midst. He was not hostile to the press; on the contrary, he was so friendly toward the pad and pencil that he might gladly have occupied most of next morning's front page. What he had to say, however, began like this: "The introduction of labor-saving machinery and methods, of which the stretch-out is a typical instance, is a basic factor of American civilization. To a greater or lesser degree all companies which survive in competition, etc., etc." If I had spent money filing much of that, I might have been fired or certainly my \$40 at the end of the week would have been docked by the usually indulgent U.P. God save us from the professors, I thought, and fled in search of Francis J. Gorman who was a reporter's life-saver, since he could always manufacture news stories even if they did not already exist. Always, if there was nothing better, Gorman could think of more bad words for his enemies.

The only visitor who would have pleased me by staying longer and saying more was Norman Thomas. The tall, agreeable Socialist with white hair and a memorably pleas-

ant smile arrived one Saturday and was mildly announced along Main Street as "that Socialist or Communist crank who ran for some office or other." After interviewing an endless list of professional labor saviours and enduring volumes of drivel, it was an instant delight when Norman Thomas breezed into the Hotel Burton lobby and a bitter disappointment when he said that he had only an hour before he must rush on to North Carolina where he was to lecture at one of the Universities that evening. The Socialist or Communist crank impressed one young reporter, if the proletariat could forgive me for saying so, as being a superior gentleman. He had personality. He was urbane. He was agreeable to look at and he possessed manners which made him stand out among the mediocre lot who came to the strike scene and left without being missed or remembered. He did not pretend to know what was what in Danville and he thought before he spoke; his sympathy, of course, was with the strikers for whom he had solicited successfully, joining Bishop McConnell, Samuel Untermeyer, and Paul Kellogg in a petition asking help for the Danville Union. But if he had stayed longer I know he would have disapproved of some of the labor tactics as much as anyone else did. Somehow or other, regardless of his prejudices, he seemed so much saner than most of our visitors that I had a deep feeling that, if he would settle down for a while and listen to both sides of an argument, he would have made an excellent judge. I felt that he would have been a fine man for what Francis J. Gorman and others were trying to accomplish. Such an opinion was based upon the most superficial impressions and, as a cynical friend observed later when I was singing the praises of the "Socialist or Communist crank" who won me by one firm handshake and straightforward smile, a closer study might have been so disillusioning that I should

have wanted to relegate Mr. Thomas to the level of the dullest of the pedagogs or the most unscrupulous of the professional uplifters of the under-dog. But I did not see him again after that Saturday and my pleasant, if superficial, impressions did not have an opportunity to change.

II

ONE afternoon when the picket line was quiet and the weather was too cold for me to stay in the garden it was diverting to spend a while with an erudite gentleman whom the children in town spoke of as Old Man Ficklen from Ficklen's Field.

Harry Ficklen was what one speaks of in the South as a "character." As a young man he had been a talented journalist and had gone to New York and allied himself with *Life* and other magazines in the days of the Gibson girls. But just as he was beginning to make a name for himself in the city he inherited valuable property in Danville and he came home to guard his possessions. His writing career was abandoned as far as New York was concerned, although his reputation as Danville's first scholar and poet was never challenged, not even by Lena Weller, whose frequent poems in the *Bee* were as flowery as the hats of 1900. He devoted himself to his property and, principally, to his home-place which stood in a thick grove of trees on a large tract of land half a mile from the muddy waters of the Dan.

The town was growing fast as the cotton mills and tobacco factories fattened on cheap labor and all about the Ficklen place houses were built and pastures for cattle became streets for men. But Mr. Ficklen, living alone in his dilapidated house, would not sell an inch of his valuable land. For lack of care the place became a jungle of tangled

weeds and vines; honeysuckle climbed up the mimosas and curled itself around the blue-berried cedars. The house was hidden from the street as though it was lost in a wilderness of green: it was said to be "hanted" and the ladies who lived nearby could not keep cooks, so frightened were most Negroes by the very thought of this Ficklen's Field where spirits were said to walk after dark and the groans of the dead broke the silence of the night. The only colored people who went near the place were a tribe from Poor House Hill known as the dirt-eaters. These Negroes, mostly fat, dusky-faced women with fallen stomachs and drooping breasts, ate clumps of red clay every morning of their lives and there was no dirt in all Pittsylvania County so good to their particular taste as the red clay that came from under a certain bank on the southeastern side of the "hanted" field. Their stomachs so craved this delicacy that, to the amazement of all other Negroes from Red Alley to Crooktown, they ventured (only by daylight, of course) to fill their baskets with the "sweet dirt" from the hiding-place of ghosts and hants.

For a long time Mr. Ficklen was part of this picture. Whenever he ventured forth from the wilderness he carried a small leather satchel which was said to contain every mystery and device of the devil. Nobody saw him without his satchel and nobody dared to ask him what he bore so faithfully at his side.

There were two happenings to make the land owner become more human in the eyes of the town. One day he moved from the tumbled-in homeplace to a house with panes in the windows and no jungle to screen it from the public. Ficklen's Field was abandoned to the evil beings which were said to moan all night because the old man had left them—and, more realistically, it was invaded by the "late dates" who left objects of evidence that they had

stolen into the honeysuckle thickets to continue love-making which had become awkward in automobiles with overhead lights shining along the streets.

What shocked the town most was that, after a brief courtship, Mr. Ficklen married one of the loveliest and gentlest ladies ever to live along the Dan. One explanation was seized upon: the lovely lady was uncommonly learned and she had married a man whose quantity of learning, whatever its quality of usefulness may or may not have been, was beyond dispute. Harry Ficklen was a source of Latin and Greek quotations, classical gems, elegant words: just as Richmond was said to need no public library with James Branch Cabell still scouting among the dictionaries, so Danville needed no higher source of wisdom than the really friendly and gracious old man whom impudent little children and an ignorant town-at-large pointed out as Old Man Ficklen from Ficklen's Field. . .

This cold afternoon I met Mr. Ficklen in the lobby of the Hotel Burton where he was established among the tobacco-chewing old men in the big leather chairs.

"Why, sir, I'm delighted to see you again! And how is your newspaper work coming along, sir? You know when I was in New York writing for *Life* and the Munsey publications, Mr. Charles Dana Gibson said to me one day—"

Thus the reminiscences began. When he spoke a decrepit, wrinkled, toothless old man disappeared and you could see the smart, wise-cracking, gentlemanly young blade of the eighties who set out from Danville for the big city just as we who were restless and perverse wanted to do today. All he needed was a starting-point and he would look away wistfully as he recalled the vanished years. He lived almost entirely in the past. Who could blame him? What was the present worth? His lovely wife had died

and with her went the best of his life. Taxes and debts and misfortunes had bereft him of his property and now he existed meanly in a furnished room. His health had gone, too, and there was nothing precious left save what he had cherished in a well-remembered past.

"Oh, my young friend, I can't begin to tell you how many interesting things we were doing in New York. My little comic pieces were appearing in *Life*. And that very year that gave me my inheritance—the worst thing that ever happened to me, the very worst—"

The only event of the last decades which he spoke of with enthusiasm was the return of Nannie Langhorne to her native heath. That was a tale I liked to hear: it bore upon a spectacle that I had witnessed as a child but which was never so vivid in my memory as when it was evoked by Mr. Ficklen's fanciest words.

"It might be well, sir, if you went with me to my room and we could look up some papers concerning Lady Astor's homecoming. You'll excuse the appearance of my lodgings, won't you? I am forced to live very humbly, you know."

"Why, I'd like ever so much to go, Mr. Ficklen."

So we went a few blocks up Main Street and past Townes's Funeral Home to a red tenement-house. Up the dark stairway we went to a small furnished room at the back of the long hall. All four walls of the little room were covered by photographs and Confederate keepsakes and the floor space was limited because of trunks and boxes which were packed to the brim with old manuscripts, letters, and innumerable remembrances of happier days.

Among a stack of musty envelopes we found one marked "Lady Astor." From a collection of notes and clippings Mr. Ficklen and I pieced together an authentic versior

of our tale in order that Lady Astor's children might know what happened when their mother went home in glory.

Nancy Langhorne Astor came back to her birthplace on May the fifth, Anno Domini 1922. It was a gala day for Danville and all the people along the countryside. All down the way the train bearing Pittsylvania's own celebrity was cheered by crowds at the little yellow stations of the Southern. At Sutherlin depot all the citizens had gathered with torches burning in every hand and a giant bonfire had been built to brighten a demonstration — which was in vain, alas, since the guest of honor had chosen this moment to pack her suitcase before her train crossed the familiar Dan; not even a telegram of thanks from Lord Astor could assuage the hurt feelings of the country folks who wanted to have a part in the city's grand to-do.

In Danville this was the day of days. The streets were decked, business was suspended, children were freed from school. Every citizen wanted to honor this beautiful lady who bowed and smiled like a movie queen making a personal appearance; and every citizen seemed to feel that the bows and smiles were for him and for him alone.

In a City Hall adorned by palms and jammed with citizenry led by the City Fathers, the first honors were done by Mayor Wooding (who was not quite eighty at the time). Stroking his sparse goatce and clearing his throat audibly, the Captain arose and addressed the radiant guest.

"Lady Astor, on behalf of the city of Danville, I welcome you to the city where your baby eyes first saw light and your baby lips first learned to speak endearing names. It is my great privilege to present you with a key to your native city and I hope you will use the key very often in the years to come."

The guest arose and accepted a key one foot in length.

"Dixie was never so good to me," rang forth a rich, deep voice which was no longer Southern. "I have never been so thrilled in all my life —"

She could only murmur brief thanks before the Captain continued his munificence.

"The motto of Danville's Chamber of Commerce is 'Danville Does Things.' Because you have done more than anyone in

Danville you have been made a permanent member of the Danville Chamber of Commerce —”

Thunderous applause was acknowledged by gracious smiles. Then an ordinance was read which informed the Viscountess Astor of England that a new street was to be christened Lady Astor Street because it crossed a field where little Nannie Langhorne had played as a child. There was fervent clapping and cheering until the meeting was adjourned and the guests hastened to another scene.

Up Main Street, just across from Rison's Alley and a stone's throw from Broad Street Bottom, the front porch of Mr. Rice Gwynn's apartment house was resplendent with flags and garlands, for it was on the site of this dwelling that little Nannie Langhorne first breathed the air of Old Virginia.

The guest of honor was seated where she could be seen by all the vast crowd in the streets who fixed their eyes hungrily upon this famous beauty who was the goddess of their town. Not a detail was missed: the soft lights in her hair, the finely carved features, the flashing eyes, the perfect complexion, the black turban hat with all its sweeping feather, the coat suit of horizon blue, the black suede slippers on dainty feet. To think that this personage was Danville's own!

Voices of assembled choirs raised the strains of "Dixie" and the second ceremony had begun. Old-timers wiped tears from their eyes when the tenors and basses sang "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia" and when the cotton mill band played "Home Sweet Home." Sentiment was as sweet as the perfume of flowers in the soft May air.

"Let every unreconstructed Southerner join in the old airs," someone cried and even the most unmusical tried to sing.

When the songs were ended, Mr. Ficklen arose to deliver the real oration of the day. Standing beneath the Confederate flag, looking very dignified and clean and solemn, he attracted attention for a moment from the celebrity beside him.

"We are here to greet our baby that went away to stand before kings and has come back to see us as 'just folks.' Bless her heart! One of us who beckoned her back most strongly has gone on —

[The crowd craned their necks for a moment to stare at relatives of the late Mr. Jones who was one of the visitor's kin.]

"—not because he was tired of waiting for her but because so many eager hands beckoned to him from the land of the leal.

"This is a remarkable hour on a really historical spot. This soft May air is vibrant with voices of the past. This roof-tree, these walls, echo to the sound of phantom footsteps. Who shall say what precious presences hover around the famous woman before us and try to attune themselves to her consciousness! Ah, Danville dames and maidens, this is enchanted ground—a veritable whilom cradle of bewitching womanhood. Besides the honoree of this proud day, other brood of the old nest, like homing birds, are nesting around us. Here today is the sister, Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson, adored of men and loved of women, inspiration of the great artist's touch, voiced like the wood-thrush, and eidolon of how many hopeless fancies feigning. Welcome to the sister of our honored guest.

"Lady Astor has been showered with compliments and set upon a splendid but lonely pedestal. I feel it my duty, in common humanity, to take her ladyship down. I want to say something bad about her, if I can find it. Tell it not in Mayfair, breathe it not in Downing Street, don't let Margot Asquith get hold of it, but do you know, fellow-citizens, that Lady Astor used to ride around this very corner on the back of Will Skinner who lived hereabouts? She can say of him as Hamlet said of Yorick, 'He hath borne me on his back a thousand times.' And Will says proudly that she was famous long before she left Danville for making the finest mud pies ever seen in these parts.

"And then we know that later she was the madcap and sport who would not break one of her horses because she wanted to keep some animal that would run away with her.

"But with all her faults we love her still, and it is my delightful commission not only to present her to this audience but first to present something from this audience to her. . .

"This cup bears in Latin the legend, 'Behold Virginia Gives a Daughter to Her Own Old Mother.' And in blunt good old John Bull English, 'Blood Is Thicker Than Water.' Yes, blood is thicker than water. Blood of Anglo-Saxon brotherhood of which may this Old Dominion be forever a first defense and the last stronghold and Lord's remnant!"

When the guest had received a cup eighteen inches high, Mr. Ficklen said, "I now present to you, Citizens of Danville, your own daughter, whom we, first of all, may claim as 'Our Nancy'—gift of little Danville to big old London; gift of the corner of Broad and Main to stately Cliveden on the Thames; gift of Chilly Langhorne and Nancy Witcher Keen, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, to Waldorf Astor, (the man's the gold for a' that), to Lloyd George and Mr. Balfour; child of romance whose story rivals an Arabian Nights' Tale; wit, beauty, and sweetheart of two nations; titled democrat, angel with a flaming sword cutting the right of way for the mothers of men; dove of war and eagle of peace; the first woman ever to sit in the British Parliament—and the last woman in the world ever to forget the sacred soil of Virginia that bore her. I present to you the incomparable Lady Astor."

Lady Astor arose when the applause finally subsided.

"Orators are like politicians," she said. "You can't believe them."

Then she began her own little oration upon a variety of subjects, pleasing most of all the W.C.T.U. ladies by saying, "There is hope for a generation that grows up without a rum shop around the corner."

She did not speak long but it was noon before the ceremony was finished. There was a period for rest before other rites were observed on the sacred grounds of the Last Capitol of the Confederacy. This performance was for the little ones. When Lady Astor arrived, clad in a flowing white dress and shaded from the May sunshine by a large Nile green hat, little girls chosen by the P.T.A. strewed rose petals before her as she walked to a balcony adorned with flowers. The lawn was thick with children and mothers; the guest had for the small ones a Message which bade them remember that our minds are gardens in which we must cultivate nice thoughts which are pretty flowers and not the unwholesome thoughts which are weeds. This sermon did not entertain several dressed-up boys and girls near the platform and they began to let forth a loud and fearful wail. "Shut up!" commanded Lady Astor before she began her task of distributing 3000 rose bushes to Danville's future citizens. Impatient hands

grabbed and shoved and pushed; first recipients clutched their prizes and screamed for Mama's help as bigger boys and girls demanded surrender in respect to age. There was a mild stampede and something like pandemonium. Quiet was not restored until Lady Astor, in all her glory of flowing white dress and Nile green hat, came down and with a voice that meant business and with a truly reproving look brought order out of chaos.

When the ordeal was ended Lady Astor drove to the Hotel Burton where she found the lobby swarming with delegates to the T.P.A. convention then in progress. "Speech! speech!" called the crowd as the fair visitor rushed through like an adored actress eluding a mass of fans. "Give us a speech!"

The first lady of Parliament paused on the steps leading to the Burton's best parlor suite and said, "You traveling men are like politicians, you are always trying to get someone to do something that they don't want to do. I know you old drummers and how you keep things going over here. Well, you keep it up, don't let them run down the old country!"

She waved and was gone.

"Oh, my, she's a great woman!" observed a prominent member of the T.P.A. "One of the great ones of the world. She certainly put Pittsylvania County on the map."

"Yeah," said a dried-up little man in a tight gray suit, "her and Claude Swanson."

"But ain't she a humdinger!" snickered an old man whose cheek bulged with Climax tobacco. "Do you know what, boys? When Mayor Wooding offered to kiss her she took a good look at the Captain and his little goatee and she said, 'I never could trust a man with whiskers.' Now don't that sound like Chilly Langhorne's girl?"

"What I like about her is this. As long as she's been over there with them Englishmen she ain't never lost her Virginia raisin'. When somebody asked her this mornin' where that Lord husband of hers come from, she said, 'He's a miserable Yankee but he's got an amazin' amount of understandin' what he gets from his grandmammy in South C'lina. Did you hear that, gentlemen, did you hear that?'"

Thus ended the tale of Nancy Astor's homecoming. . .

Before I left his room, Mr. Ficklen presented me with a poem he had written in honor of Danville's baby who walked with kings. It was like this:

Lady Nancy Langhorne, dear,
Your British title we resent.
Your pedigree as F.F.V.
Exhausts the claim of long descent!
However it be, it's plain to see
The reason you are making good.
I reckon you are not surprised:
It's mother-wit — Virginia blood!

He gave me, too, a picture of Lady Astor and himself taken on the corner where she came into the world by way of Broad and Main.

With these mementoes safe in my pocket, I said good-bye to my friend, hurried down the steps of the tenement, and started up Main Street in the direction of my home. Along the side-walks there were drifts of autumn leaves which made a crackling sound as I walked over them, hastening through the dark. How early the night had come! Well, I said to myself after recalling a number of things I should have been doing that afternoon, we Virginians never realized how time was flying while we were talking of the past.

SPECIAL correspondents were among the few who profited financially from the strike. The United Press was paying me almost as much as I made at school-teaching and, for the first time in my life, I had a few hundred dollars in the bank which were owed to no man, not even my father, who usually had me well in the red. Besides, I had bought and

paid for things I wanted : books, plants, trees, and, to meet a dare, a ridiculous small Pekinese who found herself very much at home with our Pointers and Setters and even succeeded in making a staunch friend of my mother, who had never lost much affection on dogs, although she was married to a huntsman who kept the house over-run with them. Later I wished that I had spent everything I made that winter, for, though the dog was sacrificed to one of our hit-and-run drivers, we enjoyed every day of her short stay with us ; and I still have my red Shakespeares and Prousts ; and the hemlocks and hollies grow a little each year. But the money I put in the bank ! That went to surgeons who seemed to know exactly how much I had and estimated my ailments accordingly. As I realized later, after I learned that I needed more exercise and less small-town surgery, a tree box or a set of Hazlitt would have been better for my health.

The money was earned too painfully to have been wasted. It was physically exhausting to teach from nine till three and to grade papers and to make reports and, in addition, to keep up with a strike of national importance which might have significant developments at any moment of the day or night. And physical exhaustion was only a small part : intimacy with suffering, injustices, self-satisfaction, and a variety of evils on both sides of the fence, caused anguish with which no bodily state could be compared.

It was December now and the prospect of Christmas was dreary indeed. Strikers with families were being evicted — quite legally, of course — from mill-owned homes by constables who came from the same walk of life as those whom they turned into the streets. But, oh well, the Union could find some place or other, we said, and, if worse came to worst, there was a stack of tents ready for

use. Thanks to friends, the commissary was still functioning. There were appreciable results from the visit of two strikers to the Boston convention of the A. F. of L. Della Dilreath and Lucille Humbel told the great throng that Danville workers were overworked, underpaid, and generally abused. "If we have to return to the factory unorganized it will be like going to the penitentiary," Della plead. "All we want is something to eat and something to keep our children warm in winter. We had to strike. We couldn't stand it any longer. When we worked we were so tired at the end of the day we couldn't eat and now, without work, we're starving." That avowal brought in many a case of beans.

A Miss Elizabeth Gilman whom the *Bee* described as the daughter of the first president of Johns Hopkins was a leader in the provision of relief and had something to do with the loads of food and clothes which could not come often enough to meet the increasing needs. Ten thousand cans of soup or several cars of coal did not go very far.

Along Main Street cedar trees were strung with many-colored lights but in the mill districts there were not even the usual ten-cent store decorations. "Christmas ain't what it used to be," the hands said with rueful sighs. There was no community tree now that the Welfare House had closed. There were no signs of a festive season in the village. When the Birthday of Christ came it was like any other day of the strike. The militia were marching up and down and any holiday gathering would have been an unlawful assembly. Instead of hearing greeting of "Christmas gift!" you heard "Yellow dogs! Scabs!" hissed with venom. Churches could not observe the significance of the day when congregation, even families, were sharply divided; in some instances, the son was striking and the father was swearing by the mills. The meaning of the season was

hopelessly lost. The song in the air was not "Peace on earth and mercy mild" but "We're out to win the strike." There was discord everywhere.

Even within the bosom of the Union there was discontent. A gaunt, flat-chested woman came to see Mr. Gorman after her son, had been imprisoned for strike activities. Being dissatisfied with the outcome of her visit she was ready to speak her mind to the first man who would listen.

"Why it makes me sick in my stomick!" she said. "My boy is spendin' Christmas in that stinkin' filthy jail-house an' all he done was what these here Union organizers told him to do. But *they* ain't in jail and *they* ain't eatin' off no commissary. All of 'em, from Mister Gorman right on down, is lyin' on feather beds in the ho-tel an' eatin' like Boss Mens. I wisht I hadn't never heard tell of no strike."

After such outbursts it was felt by the UTW that inspiration of the highest order was needed and the arrival of Mr. William Green of the A. F. of L. was more than welcome. While the mills' President Fitzgerald was making a rose-colored address to the assembled Rotary Club of Danville in the Hotel Burton dining-room, President Green, who looked sufficiently like an American business man or a Methodist preacher to have joined the Rotarians if they had not known him as their enemy, was sitting in the lobby talking about the future of Labor in the South. Thus the only time, so far as I knew, when Mr. Fitzgerald came near a labor leader in the flesh was when he passed through the halls of a hotel (which housed such undesirables because they paid their bill) while en route to his brothers in Rotary.

That same night seven or eight thousand people gathered in a tobacco warehouse to listen to the leader of Labor. He was an eloquent spokesman. He promised the aid of five million trade unionists. He blamed Danville churches

for not helping the strikers. He snooted the *Bee* as though our papers were not invulnerable. He talked about holier-than-thou men who refused to grant a decent living to the man who lived by his hands. And, with every other breath, he prophesied sweet victory for the cause.

But when would this victory be coming? Green, like all the others who uttered fine words, rushed on to other scenes of battle and left nobody but little Mr. Gorman whose talk of successful mediation did not carry as much weight in January as it had carried in September when the trouble was formally begun. Would the help be from Richmond? Every professor who came to town had theories about labor disputes and here we were with a professor in the governor's chair: so might we not expect some academic panacea? Of course Danville was thankful to Governor Pollard for sending his militia but Danville would be still more thankful now if he would remove the trouble which necessitated the soldiers' costly attentions.

13

THE last visit of His Honor, the Governor, was a rich chapter in my own personal history. Until this night in January I had never met a governor, I had never exchanged a word with anyone so politically important unless I boasted of the time I was at the White House and Mrs. Coolidge came downstairs by chance and said, 'How do you do?' to me and several hundred other curious Americans who were tramping through the politicians' heaven. Although the editor of our paper said I was the greatest celebrity-hunter he had ever known, I do not think that he, sharp enemy that he was, would have said I paid court to many politicians; the celebrities he referred to were mostly writers whose friendship I treasured in spite of their fame.

Really I was innocent of governors and their ways when I went downtown that night after supper to be told on every side that the Honorable John Garland Pollard had just arrived and was then in conference with Fitzgerald at the mill president's home on West Main. I rushed up Main Street and reached the big white house just as the governor, piloted by the military and a number of our most important citizens, was coming out of the residence to get in his limousine. After seeing his likeness in the state papers in connection with every event from Baptist rallies to the Apple Blossom Festival, there was no difficulty in recognizing him: a portly, white-haired, bespectacled old gent who looked as though he was very pleased with the world and more especially his own part of it. But he looked rather grandfatherly, I thought, notwithstanding his pompous mien; I did not think it would take too much gall to approach him. Disregarding his protectors, who glared at me as if I were much too young and too insignificant to address His Honor, I pushed in and said, "Governor Pollard, I represent the United Press and I should like to get a statement from you, if you care to make one."

"No, sir, I don't want anyone to know I'm in town."

I was wondering if there was anyone in Danville who had not discovered his presence already, spotting him by the fine car or learning the news from people at the hotel, but I said merely, "You mean you wish nothing said about this visit?"

"Not a word. Perhaps tomorrow I may have something to say. Meanwhile I'll ask you not to use my name."

"I'll do so, Governor, if I may be assured that you will give nothing out to other newspaper representatives?"

I knew only too well that the governor was better acquainted with the A.P. than with the U.P., which was not so firmly established in the Old Dominion.

"I'll have nothing to say to anyone about this visit. I wish no publicity."

With that he entered his limousine and drove away with his respectful train.

It was something of a surprise to learn a few hours later from a reporter for the A.P. that His Honor had been conversing intimately and exclusively with his friends of the *Register* and *Bee*. It was his privilege to change his gubernatorial mind and there was no reason, after all, I supposed, that I should expect a busy man like the governor to remember one little reporter. Anyway, it seemed very evident that our agreement had come to an end. So in my first wire the next morning, I stated casually that Governor Pollard was in town, had conferred with Fitzgerald, and had nothing to say to the United Press. Writing that brief and trivial item, which was lost no doubt in the volume of news which a great press bureau collects from state to state in a single morning, I did not know that I was writing an end to my personal integrity and ending my eligibility as a young gentleman of the Old Dominion. But by afternoon I knew that much and more. From the *Register* and *Bee* I learned that the United Press had spoiled the governor's plans for mediation because its representative had broken his word with the governor who had returned to the capitol despondent, now that all was lost. The spokesman he left behind him was our commonwealth attorney who seemed to be perfectly sober when he announced that "the *Register* and *Bee* and the A.P. deserve to be commended for respecting the governor's confidence and for lending their aid to do something worth while in connection with the local situation. If premature publicity should result in preventing any constructive action in this matter, the responsibility seems to rest with the United Press."

That went out over the wires and within an hour or two I seemed to have bosses all over the country. From New York to Atlanta I was bombarded with telegrams and calls from this United Press which I was said to have disgraced. "What in God's name have you done?" they seemed to cry with one voice.

"It's just this," I replied to my highest chief. "Pollard told me not to mention his arrival. I said I wouldn't if he didn't talk to other papers. He agreed and I agreed. Then he talked to his old friend, the *Bee*, so I disagreed. Anyway, what difference did it make if a reporter said His Majesty was among us after everybody else already knew it? Who cared? And, tell me, am I working for every politician who comes along puffing hot air or am I working for the United Press?"

"Is that all? Are you kidding us?" said the man at the other end of the wire, one of many who feared I had put the company in a jam. "Send me proof. I think I get the drift. We'll send you help if you need it."

I rushed to the Fitzgeralds' again and, thanks to Harriett, I got by the guard of cops and reached her father's room. Mr. Fitzgerald, clad in robe and slippers, was trying to rest; a book entitled, as I recall, "King Cotton Is Sick," lay on the table near his chair. When he saw me he got up and was very courteous and tried to understand what I was saying. But my excitement reacted upon him and his deafness seemed twice as acute. I raised my voice and exercised my lips to shape words but it was all in vain. In despair we resorted to the written word.

On the back of an envelope which I have kept until this day I wrote: "The rival press says the United Press thwarted 'settlement of the strike' by mentioning the fact that you and Governor Pollard conferred. By the 'rival press,' of course, I mean The Danville Branch."

Mr. Fitzgerald looked down at me over his horn-rim spectacles and smiled rather boyishly. He had a way of smiling at almost anything that did not deal directly with the subject of Organized Labor; those two words invariably changed the smile to a scowl. After a moment he turned the envelope over and wrote this sentence: "So far as I know and believe, no statement that you have made has had any effect whatever upon our position." He signed the statement and handed the envelope to me. Now that this was over we were relieved; he could talk better now and we returned to oral language.

"This is all nonsense, my boy," he said, speaking with the unplaced, metallic voice common to so many people afflicted with deafness. "You ought not to be mixed up with these people in the first place. They're just professional trouble-makers—"

"It's not the Union crowd I'm peeved with, Mr. Fitzgerald," I said slowly while he read my lips and while I was wondering in the back of my mind how his workers who, he said, were free to air their grievances to him whenever they chose, could ever make him understand a word of their slovenly speech. "It's old Governor Pollard and his local lackeys—"

"Oh, yes, of course. There wasn't any *conference*. There could not be any. The governor has his job and I have mine. He came here and I received him hospitably but I made it clear to him that he could not induce me to talk to any Union leaders. Never in this world, my boy, never in this world. But don't you worry about what the papers say. If you haven't done anything, why bother?"

"Thanks ever so much, Mr. Fitzgerald," I managed to say at last and then I excused myself and rushed out of the roomy halls of the residence and down Main Street

to the Hotel Burton. I got what I needed from the UTW. My outcast friends testified nobly, too nobly, perhaps, since they were slightly prejudiced in matters which involved the local press. But their testimony was added to Mr. Fitzgerald's and telegraphed to New York to save my name and person from the consequences of this outburst of the governor and his train.

Meanwhile the news spread about town. At an afternoon bridge party a sweet Southern voice drawled, "I don't know what he lied about or how it happened or anything like that—I couldn't get it all straight—but, Lawdy, Honey, imagine a young man doin' that way to the Guvuhnuh of Firginyer! Isn't it awful?" The tempest had not passed. . . What I cared about, of course, was what intelligent newspaper men would think. Laurence Stallings, when I told him about the affair after he came south, said, "Would a good newspaper man have made the agreement you did to begin with?" I daresay that the point was pertinent.

But now it was done and I feared at first that the cards were too heavily stacked against me; I did not think a young man in his early twenties was a match for a white-haired governor and I could not expect to emerge unhurt. But lo and behold my boss sent as big a check as ever and asked me if I was holding my own all right and reminded me of some other trouble in Nashville, Tennessee, which caused one Rex Goad to observe, "There is a type of madness here in which it is a pleasure to feel thoroughly sane." Well, however Mr. Goad may have felt in whatever mix-up he was in, I felt anything but thoroughly sane. . Nevertheless I went on with my boss's letter, learning that "the United Press in the Old South has no friends, no enemies, plays hand in glove with nobody, but aims solely to watch the government and report the facts." After receiving this

and other letters of support I sat down like the youth that I was and wrote a letter to Governor Pollard which was something less than a eulogy. From the capitol came a long and pompous wire which informed me once and for all that I had delayed and perhaps defeated settlement of the strike by breaking my word.

Perhaps this sparring between a venerable politician and an officious reporter who seemed to lack respect for white hair beneath a governor's crown might have continued if Mr. Josephus Daniels' paper down in Raleigh had not seized a good chance to laugh at the horseplay being staged in the Tarheels' aristocratic neighbor to the north. The tale in North Carolina was something like this: What wonderful plans Governor Pollard must have had that one obscure reporter should come along and ruin them with one brief dispatch. Wasn't there a better way to shift the blame, wasn't there a more likely goat?

Thus ended the bout. It was good experience for me because I was young but I don't know what good it did the governor. I learned that we do not have to worry too much when the general public is told things about us which are not true: our friends and our families usually know when we are right or wrong and that is what really matters. Still I could not understand why I was picked to hold the bag while bigger people made a graceful exit from a difficult scene.

14

In retrospect I could think of that farce as supplying comic relief before the dénouement of a real tragedy.

A kind of false spring had come to Virginia. Jonquils were pushing out of the ground too soon and the color of the lilac buds troubled gardeners who knew that more bad weather was on the way. I knew that the pickets on

duty would need their fires again. Being either prescient or pessimistic, as you will, I knew that the trouble was far from ended.

Certainly I could not see much reason to believe that Gorman's promise of victory would be fulfilled. The Union talk was less cocksure now. In September they had been saying, "If we lose in Danville, Dixie's largest mills, we lose everywhere in the South." Now in January, in the fiftieth week of the strike, they were reversing that opinion by saying, "Danville is only an incident in our plans and the future of the Union in the South does not depend upon victory here." They must have known that all was not well. Mr. Green had said, "If Almighty God is with us, we cannot lose." But it was beginning to seem as though Almighty God, like Governor Pollard, had joined Capital and left Labor to Green, Gorman, and the overnight visitors. The militia guarded the mills while strike-breakers went in and set about the tasks which the strikers had left undone; machines were uncovered again, business was resumed as though nothing had happened. As many as twenty-five hundred workers were employed; some were outsiders imported under the protection of the soldiers' guns, some were old hands who had tired of the strike and had decided that a job in the mill was the lesser of evils after all. Mr. Fitzgerald said that prospects were cheerful. "The strike has caused your company but little inconvenience," he told his stockholders who believed him when dividend checks appeared in their morning mail.

Nobody paid much attention to rumors of violence and crime. Although the mill president's home was still guarded by a formidable array of cops it was considered safe for its inmates to appear in the open as was shown, for instance, when Miss Harriett Fitzgerald, well bundled in fur to withstand the January cold which had followed

the mockery of spring, came forth one Thursday afternoon to address the ladies of the Shakespeare Club on "The Post Impressionists in Art."

The strikers, even now when they were confronted by the glaring face of defeat, were so peaceful that the militia did not have enough work to keep them out of mischief. Considering the fact that guns were made to be used and the fact that strikers were not offering themselves as targets, it cannot be surprising that at least one of the boys should have a little fun while employing his Home Guard rules in the name of duty. One night a young man from North Carolina, who had no connection with our dispute, came across the boundary in his run-down car loaded with sixty gallons of sparkling corn liquor which was being eagerly awaited by citizens with empty kegs. The young man had nothing to do with the strike. He was careless of the martial atmosphere; he was careless, too, when, after he had crossed the Schoolfield Bridge and driven up the curved road by the long row of workers' cottages with their primitive little toilets in the forlorn back yards, the khaki-clad figures shouted, "Halt! Halt!" Nobody knows what A. L. Picket (that, ironically, was his name) thought at that moment or whether he thought at all but he did what most bootleggers did when they found the law upon their trail; he stepped on the gas. The soldier boy, who was carrying a loaded rifle for the first time since he went on duty, shot and shot straight. A. L. Picket was carried to Memorial Hospital to die.

Perhaps we should have been glad that there were not more innocent victims and that the militia's amusements were for the most part less destructive: being drunk and disorderly, hitting policemen with pop bottles, and, as the *Bee* said decorously, "offering indignities" to mill girls who, the khaki-clad youths protested when mildly rebuked by

authorities, were "spies in women's clothes" whom they were seeking to arrest. *Arrest*, Southern gentlemen said when the ladies were not present, was a new word for an old custom. Well, it was not known what the boys would be up to next if they stayed much longer. And Mr. Gorman was still hanging on. He was grabbing for straws. He had invited Rev. W. B. Spofford of New York to speak. Local Episcopalians refused to believe that this divine was an emissary of their denomination when he brought a check for \$1000 from a certain Church League of Industrial Democracy, a check which was said to represent donations of ten bishops. The crazy Yankee, as he was termed on the street corners, made himself slightly unwelcome when he talked about slave religion, quoting a little poem :

Work and pray
Live on hay
You'll eat pie
Bye and bye
In the sky.

The intruder's endorsement of collective bargaining and his reference to mill-owned ministers were cited as typical examples of the preposterous behavior of Americans from the North and it was felt by most of Danville that the air of the town could never be salubrious again until Gorman and all his undesirable appendages were returned to whatever God-forsaken homes they had left. Strong language was not spared. . .

Then one morning the wishes began to come true !

To the amazement of at least one reporter Mr. Gorman issued a statement that the strike had been called off because an honorable agreement had been made between the Union and the mills. No defeat was admitted : nothing was said concerning lack of food at the commissary, the

futility of struggling against the militia, the state, the public-at-large. All would be well for the strikers, claimed the labor organizers as they went to their North-bound Pullmans. And they stuck to their story in spite of a stout denial from Mr. Fitzgerald—a solemn declaration that he had never ceded one point to one Union representative and never would so long as he had a breath of life.

What enigmatical smiles! What mystery! Francis J. Gorman departed cheerfully while a belligerent element of the population reproached itself for failing to give him a public flogging like that which Cleo Tessner, another organizer, had received in Tennessee. Before he left I tried my best to get him to explain what he really meant by an honorable agreement. I told him that the public, even those who had been most sympathetic to the cause of Labor in the South, would never understand this exit and that I believed the Union would never recover from this act. There was a third party, he claimed. Who? "Just wait a few days," he said blithely but secretively, "and you'll see what I mean, 'you'll see that we won.'" I never saw what he meant, I never saw that the Union won.

And so departed our little English-American, his only public farewell being rendered by his fellow-countryman, G. Tetley, of the *Bee*, whose eloquence on this momentous day was unsurpassed:

It has been a painful and bitter lesson and one which the South as a whole will take to heart. The spearhead of the Southern unionization campaign has been dulled against the impregnable side of a corporation which had the courage to meet an attempt to wrest control of its affairs and which did it with dignity and not without magnanimity. Danville has been drained a fair share of its commercial life blood by being made the stamping ground of paid workers of the Industrial Utopia who have become lost in the wilderness of failure. And the workers have been made the goat.

After this effusion had been published, just before the parting, Gorman met G. Tetley and said, "Well, I see you have been vomiting again." Tetley poked one at little Gorman who hit back quickly. In rushed big Willie Shands Meacham to aid Tetley against the foe who was attempting to wield a chair against the editor of the *Bee*. Then officials of the hotel came between the pugilists and the excitement was quelled, much to the disappointment of some old men who had left their arm-chairs and spittoons in hope of seeing a lively fight.

15

It did not appear that there would be much more news. So the reporters and special correspondents went back to their papers and I settled into my uncomfortable rut at the school. What we thought to be the end of our story was inglorious indeed: Gorman saying he had gained something which the management of the mills flatly denied and, meanwhile, the ringleaders in the strike discovering that they were about as welcome at the textile employment office as Gorman would have been at a stockholders' meeting in the Fitzgerald inner sanctum. Some people had lost what little they had and gained nothing; but one wondered if they were much more fortunate than those who, defeated in what they thought to be an effort to better their lot, were forever cowed and subdued.

We might have gone on speculating and theorizing for many a dull winter's evening if an unexpected act of God had not broken again the comparative quiet of our town.

The last week of February I was shaken from sleep one midnight by my father who, barefooted, and clad in baggy white pajamas which made him look like a frightened ghost, stood by my bed, saying, "Get up, Boy, get up quick, and

write something for your papers. Harry Fitzgerald is dead."

Quickly I dressed and ran down our street and around the corner to the white house which was lighted all over and astir with the activity of relatives and friends and the tradesmen of death. I got some facts for my papers: the man who had risen from office boy to the presidency of the South's largest cotton mills and the presidency of the American Cotton Manufacturers' Association had died suddenly of angina pectoris which, according to his doctors, was aggravated by recent months of mental anguish and physical strain. When the story was telephoned to New York and Atlanta I went home and tried to sleep.

There was never such mourning in Danville. Flags were at half-mast; stores closed their doors. For hours workers from the mills filed by the antique silver coffin where lay all that was left of the man whom Gorman had called their oppressor: they forgot their grudges—the big salaries and small wages, the mean boss men he had under him, the accumulation of petty grievances—and they remembered the times he came through the mills and called them by their names and watched them weave and doff, the times he lent them money, the times he found answers for personal problems they could never have solved for themselves. They wept when a little boy, who had been the dead man's caddy on the links, came for a last look at the golfer whose good-natured ways and handsome tips would be sorely missed. They pooled their resources and, even if they could not send as handsome a wreath as a George A. Sloan or the kings of cotton, they sent the most ornate designs their small amounts of money could buy.

When the hearse reached the cemetery more than a mile away the rear end of the procession of mourners had not left the white house where the deceased had lived and died.

The last verses of "Fight the Good Fight" had hardly been uttered before the *Bee* was out to tell of a man who walked "with the princes of finances but kept the common touch"; who had said, "They can kill me but they can't scare me"; who had "proved that Napoleon was right in saying that it is the cause and not the death that makes the martyr." Puzzling over these oracular words before they turned to Help Wanted or Salesman Sam, the workers who had not joined the strike told workers who had cast their lot with the Union that Almighty God would be calling for an answer. Thus the future of the Union in Danville was very bleak and, as Mr. Gorman and Mr. Green had been among the first to admit, the affairs of the South's most important cotton mills had been watched from afar.

16

As a servant of the public schools, I was expected, according to the terms to which we all subscribed, to cooperate actively in church and community life. So, for instance, when I was called upon by the ladies of the Thursday Afternoon Shakespeare Club, who were covering Europe that year, to discuss the drama of Scandinavia in a brief address, I acquiesced, being slightly more eager to attend the Shakespeare Club than I was to concoct a bird's eye view of such a formidable portion of Culture. But my friend, Miss Sallie, the librarian, got together enough books for me to prepare the necessary "paper." Miss Sallie was a devoted Shakespearian herself and was pleased to assist.

On the appointed Thursday afternoon I put on my best blue suit and appeared before the group at a member's house on the newly christened Lady Astor Street, not far from the jungle of Ficklen's Field. Semicircles of chairs had been set around our hostess's bright living-room and

hall and the much dressed-up ladies sat close together, buzzing mightily until I arose, paper in hand, to dispense with the subject of the day.

Thanks to Miss Sallie's reference books, my speech was erudite from the first flourish. And what was most important, without going into any shocking details it gave the impression of being very broad-minded by extolling Candor, Tolerance, Independence of Convention, and a number of virtues which, when presented wholly in the abstract, were suitable to very literary occasions. We moved at a rapid pace. I had begun at four-thirty and in fifteen minutes I had carried Ibsen from birth to death and had Strindberg well under control.

Then, just as we were reaching the heights of the Scandinavian tragedy, we were brought to earth by a great commotion at the rear of our assembly. An elderly cousin of mine who had never been prompt in her life had arrived and, not being content with a seat at the back, was elbowing her way among the seated ladies to a vacant chair on the front row, very close to her kinsman, the flustered speaker. When her goal was reached, when she had settled herself comfortably and smiled at me as a signal to resume operations, she lowered her head toward her bosom and before I could get much further with the Strindbergian verities she was peacefully asleep. It made me feel very sad; she looked so blissful, dozing there with her mouth half-open so as to emit a little purring noise which might have been excused as loud breathing rather than out-and-out snoring, whereas the other ladies, with a few exceptions, bore on their faces the grim, manufactured smiles of those who suffer stoically to the end.

"The message of Ibsen was a revolutionary one," I said, reaching at last the final paragraph of the paper. "If Ibsen preaches at all, he says, be truthful, be free, be yourself!"

Then the end came and there was a flattering show of applause. My cousin, awake from her refreshing nap, was the first of the ladies to rush properly toward me and to exclaim, "It was just *lovely!* Perfectly *lovely!* I enjoyed every minute and I'll tell you right now I'm *mighty* proud to have such a smart young cousin." She was the most truthful of all her sister Shakespearians. She was completely herself.

Duty was accomplished now and the *real* meeting could begin. The ladies could relax and show themselves at their admirable best.

The doors of the dining-room were thrown open and feminine eyes, which had been resting apathetically upon the sad spectacle of a young man delivering a Cultural Paper, brightened before an array of candles, silver, lace, bought flowers, and edible delicacies which no other hostess of the Shakespeare Club could possibly excel.

Now everyone was at ease. The dainty sandwiches were delicious and a variety of cake made one wonder where to start and when to stop: all was as attractive as Miss Kate would say it was in the Society column of Sunday's paper. Scandinavian drama was far away, indeed, as we ate contentedly, chattering volubly about strained spinach for babies and approaching weddings and even spicier topics which concerned our own little town rather than the world beyond the Dan.

NOBODY had a better time at such gatherings than I did and I was sorry that I was suspected so often of appearing with false motives rather than with the desire, which every public servant should have, to cooperate actively in civic life by being a genuine mixer with a ready smile.

Now, to cite one of numberless cases, when a convention of Virginia Rotarians came to town I would not have missed the affair for anything in the world. I could not see why, after a general invitation to the public had been extended, I should have been told that the presence of persons with the wrong spirit was not desired. I did not see anything wrong with my spirit. I went to the meetings with my notebook and sat quietly at the back of the assembly without disturbing a single soul. I just wanted to have a good time as much as the others did.

This was a spectacle which no reporter could ignore. Mr. Mencken wrote me that he was tired of hearing about Rotarians and not to tell him another word about what they did or said but I wasn't writing for him, anyway; I was writing for myself.

Danville's motto of "Danville Does Things" had been put to the test when five hundred Rotarians and their Rotary Annes arrived one bright spring morning from all corners of the Old Dominion and distant states. Signs of "WELCOME ROTARY" were posted all over town and on automobile windshields were stickers saying "RIDE WITH ME." Willie Shands Meacham editorialized to welcome an organization which, he said at length, had long since "emerged from the short twilight during which it was considered to be a medium of pleasant social intercourse among business executives and has moved steadily across the national platform etc. etc." Main Street ladies opened their homes and gardens and Old Virginia hospitality was on display. There was not one discordant note, unless one chose to notice a few grumblers who blamed Rotarians, along with Lions and Kiwanians, for the prevailing custom which led young men to address their white-haired elders by familiar titles of Johnny or Buck or Sam instead of more deferential titles of Mr.

Brown or Mr. Posey or Mr. Sauerbeck. But few paid attention to such old-timers. The town-at-large was jubilant with true convention spirit. "Yours in the sunshine of Rotary" was the common thought.

On a palm-decked platform sat District Governor "Brownie" Brown with leading sons of Rotary. On the wall above his head was a portrait of Paul Harris, Founder of Rotary, beside a portrait of George Washington, Founder of Our Country; and above the two likenesses hung the Star Spangled Banner. Brownie chose as his subject, "What Will You Do With Rotary?," his model being the pulpit topic, "What Will You Do With Jesus?"

His speech was memorable indeed but it could not touch the discourse of Dusty Miller, who was called the Will Rogers of Ohio and the most wholesome Rotarian in America. One thing was certain: Dusty knew how to please.

"Grace has a notion the apple-blossom season down here with you will be a flop unless she comes along and smiles at 'em. And remember this: It's getting back to ancestral territory for me. My folks all come from Old Virginny and most all of us still call a sack a poke. Now, I travel 177 days of the year to spread the Gospel of Rotary, but no place is as good as Danville. From now on when Grace and I say our 'Now I lay me' at nights, we are going to add fervently: 'And, please, Lord, sometime let us get back to Danville. Amen.' From the bottom of my heart I hope you love your town, your state, your home, your work. There is only one world problem and that is hate. Only one antidote for it, and that is love. Love and kisses will go lots further in the home than money will. . . I once visited a club in which there was only one picture on the wall, that of a man with a few words under it which read like this: 'He played the game of life vigorously, he won without boasting, he lost without wrangling. When the great contest of life was over he met the future smiling and unafraid.' As I looked at that picture and read that

tribute, I said to myself, 'I wonder if anybody will ever say that about me?'"

Other utterances were no less enlightening. For example, I learned from one delegate that *Rotary Magazine*, the most inspirational magazine in the world, has among its contributors the foremost writers of our time, Ray Lyman Wilbur, W. W. Atterbury, and William Lyon Phelps.

"Read our great magazine," he said, "and get a new vision of Rotary."

By attending the sessions I felt that I was getting a new vision at first hand. I learned from Bud Jackson, of Wisconsin, a member of Rotary International, more than I could have learned from the printed page. Among other fine things Bud said:

"Had there been a Rotary Club in Alexandria at the time, George Washington could have qualified for membership as a soldier, educator, farmer, merchant, engineer, lawyer, or almost any other qualifications, and yet a great many of us have trouble in qualifying for one. If George Washington could walk into this room today, what might be his message to us? I believe he would say to us, 'Rotarians of Virginia, come walk with me to the very depths of despair at Valley Forge. Look all about you, then go to your jobs with heads up and with courage. Go forward, Rotarians!'"

All was not so solemn. Ruth Rhodeheaver Thomas, sister of Billy Sunday's songstress and sweetheart of the 56th district, had been imported to sing. J. P. Dillings brought his fiddle down from Mountain Valley to play "Pop Goes the Weasel" and "Turkey in the Straw." Jeter Jones presented the Rotary classic, "Did She Fall or Was She Pushed?" Delight was unrestrained. Bish Bishop, professor of English at Averett College, supply pastor in Baptist pulpits, and president-elect of Danville Rotary, said,

"I have lost six pounds but it was six pounds well lost." Johnny Wyatt, the prospering grocer, said, "I used to think Rotary was just a place where you went to eat but now I have a new vision." And when the strains of "Happy Days Are Here Again" were raised, it seemed that the lungs of every Rotarian and Rotary Anne would burst with joy.

18

THE outside activities of a public school teacher were often more amusing and less disheartening than the daily happenings within administrative offices or classrooms. The actual grind of teaching I did not find unbearable. Although it was difficult to persuade boys and girls not to say "This here is me" or "I come yestiddy" when many of their parents said as much and worse, there were from time to time little bits of achievement which made one feel that all the effort might not be in vain. A shy, unsocial girl of a poor family learned to read and write French with ease and I found her some correspondents among her contemporaries in France with whom she began and continued a correspondence which gave her endless delight and broadened her outlook perceptibly. And there were out of my hundred students perhaps seven or eight who possessed a desire for knowledge of good books and life beyond their own limited boundaries.

Persons who think too much about futility should not try to teach. It is satisfying at the end of a day to tell yourself, "I have spaded a good sized piece of land" or "I have waxed three floors" or, even, "I have written a pretty good article for the papers." In each of these instances you are speaking of tangible results of effort. But it is sad when you say, "Here are heads which I tried to penetrate with a few simple facts and a little common sense,"

for the heads invariably look the same after your efforts as they did before.

But for all that it was such matters as discipline and not the attempt to impart information which caused me melancholy and nervous exhaustion worse than that owed to any other occupation I have tried; and, as it was said more than once, I have tried a number. Most of the ordeal of discipline impressed me as being a struggle between teachers and parents as much as between teachers and pupils.

"You must not chew gum, Sarah. It's not lady-like."

"Mama chews gum and I reckon *she's just as much a lady* as anybody else."

"You must not smoke, Henry. It's against the rules. Besides, you're only fourteen and smoking will play the devil with the fine physique of yours you ought to be caring about—"

"The Old Man knows I smoke."

"You should not feel so bitterly toward Negroes, Bill. It seems to me you'd want to see them get a new school—"

"My Daddy says the South wouldn't be a fit country to live in if we didn't keep niggers in their places."

The influence—or lack of influence—of parents was too strong and the teacher could seldom win. I had a fifteen-year-old girl in one of my classes who seemed to be the devil incarnate. She was a brazen, impudent piece with short, yellow hair, heavily rouged cheeks and lips, and a saucy, upturned nose which she caked with pinkish-white powder. She wore to school an imitation fur coat, dirty satin dresses, rolled stockings, and worn-out high heels which she must have unearthed at one of those rummage sales which the church ladies gave to get money from impoverished Negro tobacco workers so they might help their Christian prospects in more romantic China or Japan. Her voice was perfectly in accord with the rest of her

person: a hard, tough voice of which most salesladies in the five-and-ten would have been ashamed.

She was named for a jewel, so I shall call her Pearl. To begin with, I must confess that I did not dislike her half so much as I did some of the little saints who sat close by my desk.

One morning I was selecting a passage from the Holy Scriptures to begin the day according to orders from the superiors. If I allowed the children to recite a favorite verse, which was one legitimate procedure for morning devotionals, they seemed to have a unanimous preference for the 35th verse of the 11th Chapter of St. John: the first called upon would say, "Jesus wept." Then the others would say, "He got mine, I was gonna say that one, 'Jesus Wept' was mine, too." So I found it expedient to choose a passage and read it myself. While I was perusing the Psalter that morning, suddenly there was a commotion in the back of the room which made me jump to my feet and rush toward the source of trouble which was, of course, Pearl in a tantrum. With her hands on her hips she stood by her desk and fixed a formidable scowl upon two large, frightened boys whom she had just visited with resounding smacks. Unaware of her approaching teacher and the dismay of the rest of her schoolmates, she could see nothing save the objects of her wrath.

"You goddam sons of bitches," she said. "Don'cha never lay your stinkin' hands to tech nothin' of mine agin or I'll knock the last piece of hell out of your ugly haids! Do you hear me, do you hear me, you big overgrown bastards!"

They heard—and so, much to my bewilderment, did I.

"I'll see you after school, Pearl," I stammered. "All of you open your books and study till the bell rings. But, before you start, I'll ask Pearl to apologize to you."

"I 'pologize to you and these here kids," Pearl muttered, her rage still evident, "but I meant every goddam — I mean every word I said to them boys. They swiped my books."

"What books?"

She handed me two much-worn volumes which were adorned both within and without by truly shocking photographs of males and females in the nude and in slightly surprising postures. I took the books as nonchalantly as I could and hid them in my desk drawer until Pearl and I were alone after the last bell that afternoon. Then I took them out and returned them to their owner.

She was sitting in front of me but she seldom looked me straight in the eye. Her lips, even more heavily rouged now, were pursed in the manner of a sulking child; the very high heels of her frayed slippers tapped the floor impatiently. She was not half so concerned as I was, for I really did not know what to do or what to say. One thing was certain, however: Pearl had been to higher authorities several times for no good at all and this time I was determined to deal with her myself.

"I honestly don't know what to say to you, Pearl. I don't think I'm a prig about such things. My mother is always after me about using words she disapproves of and I've even had my friends to call me down for language they didn't like. But really I never thought I'd hear a girl your age talk the way you did."

"Well, I didn't mean nothin' against you, honest I didn't. It won't be the kids neither. It was them god — I mean it was them boys."

"It certainly didn't show us any respect —"

"I said I didn't have nothin' against you."

"I have nothing against you, either. But that's not the point, Pearl. I want to help you. I don't mean to preach to you. I have no more use for preachers than you do."

But your talk is pretty filthy and I think it will hurt your own chances—”

“You see, though, I wouldn’t a said nothin’ and I wouldn’t a bothered nobody if them boys had kept their thievin’ hands to theyselves. I don’t never mess with no little boys and they didn’t have a bit of business with my books, did they?”

“Certainly not. But do you think school was the right place to bring such books?”

“I guess not.”

“Where did you get them, Pearl, if you don’t mind telling me?”

She smiled significantly as though my inquiry had evoked memories far too personal to be dwelt upon in detail. But, after a moment’s reflection, she broke into a silly laugh.

“My dates give ’em to me. Last night I was out with *two* travelin’ salesmen. I’ll tell you them guys was *plenty* hot!”

“Does your mother know where you go, Pearl?”

“She don’t know and she don’t care.”

“What about your father?”

“Off some place. Ain’t to home.”

“Even if no one else cared what you did, you ought to care about yourself. You aren’t being fair to yourself—”

“Oh, I know what you mean. Don’t you worry. I ain’t gonna get caught. Not me.”

“Well, we’ll talk this out later. But for the present I’m going to ask several things of you. Please leave such books at home hereafter. I’m not going to ask you not to read such books, for that’s your own affair. Of course, I *hope very much* that you’ll have the sense to put your mind to better use.”

“I just brought ’em to my girl friend. Them boys was too young to see stuff like that, anyhow.”

"Will you promise to try your best not to curse in the school?"

"Sure," she promised cheerfully. And then she looked up at me in unconcealed amazement. "You ain't gonna put me out?"

"Of course not. What do you mean, anyway?"

"The kids said you was gonna put me downstairs in Old Lady X's room—"

"You can't talk about the other teachers to me, Pearl."

"Well, I was gonna stop school. I hate all old maids. Old Lady X is mean as a snake and I know I couldn't keep my promise if she said so much as 'scat' to me. She's the worst old maid of the whole bunch. I never seen such a lady—"

"You're not going to be moved to Miss X's room, Pearl. I'm glad to have you if you will only have a little more consideration for me and the rest of your schoolmates and, I might add, a little more consideration for yourself. That's all."

She got up and marched herself haughtily out of the room and down the hall.

From that day she gave no trouble as far as I was concerned. She would have little to do with the other pupils in my room; she did not trust herself to speak and I knew how difficult it was for her to be one kind of a lady at home and another kind of a lady at school. At my suggestion she took up basketball but she was too rough and would have run all the other players away if she had not quit. She hated most of her teachers, especially those women teachers who were more definitely classified as spinsters, but she never blamed anyone for the fact that she failed every subject on every report. She developed a labored respect for her reformer which made me wish sometimes

that she would burst into a torrent of blasphemy to relieve the strain. I was glad when she moved away from town.

19

PEARL was not the most difficult or even the most disagreeable problem I encountered. I confess that I had more patience with her than I did with the boy who wrote an English composition for me on "Playing Square with God," although he knew, just as well as I did, that of all my cheaters he was the shark. She bothered me much less than a colleague who found that an offence had different penalties for the son of a prominent citizen and for the son of a mill worker who studied side by side in Mr. Jefferson's democratic Virginia schools. Dealing with her was a joy compared to serving a Red Tape worshipping State Board who ruled that every teacher must take a course in Hygiene and Sanitation (which was presided over by a petty old lady who corrected the papers with red ink and spent her spare time thinking of silly assignments): no one could excel an educator who presented supposedly grown men and women with a course which requested among other absurdities that we draw a picture of the privy we would build for ourselves, if we were suddenly removed from civilization and deprived of modern plumbing. Right now I can see my little masterpiece of architecture in a mythical forest, a ridiculous little one-sided affair with one seat, which showed once and for all that Art was not among my talents.

There should have been a study in our curriculum devoted to the minds of professional educators. There is no more baffling species than that which devotes itself to a study of Education's Goal and whether pupils' deportment

should be graded by A, B, C, D or 1, 2, 3, 4. Such asinities were commonplace and had to be considered as part of the daily grind like correcting papers or making an endless variety of reports. One needed a meek tongue, a thick skin, a great love of salary, and a smile to hide every wicked thought. Yet, no matter how hard one tried, there were times when trouble insisted upon coming out in the open. There was, for instance, the history of a girl who could sing.

She had been one of my students from the first. She was sixteen years old. She was not very pretty, not impressive in any way until she sang. Her voice was a fresh, lyric soprano which had been best when it was as God had given it to her—which is to say that it had not been improved by the music department of a local school for girls. Several music lovers had spoken of her to me sometime before and the first time I heard her sing the simple songs she had learned easily and naturally by herself, I felt that praise was justified indeed. My earliest wish was to bring her to the attention of a friend in New York who had contacts with the Juilliard Institution and other schools of music. That was a wild dream, I soon discovered, for the girl was surrounded on all sides by guardian angels too powerful for me. Although she was in my beginner's French and had not mastered the first rudiments of the language, what could I say before local Maestros and Mesdames who, within a two years' course, could have small town girls singing in two or three languages which sounded impressively foreign enough to audiences unmindful of alien tongues?

All the same, it was irksome to me to hear high notes, which had been clear and true, become screechy and false and strained. The voice was growing much the worse for wear. And no wonder: the poor girl sang over the local

radio, at churches, at school assemblies, at gatherings of Lions, Elks, Red Men, Woodmen of the World, Pythians, W.C.T.U., Odd Fellows, American Legioners, Parents and Teachers, and for every one of the innumerable organizations which thrive in a Southern town. She thought each new invitation an honor which she could not afford to refuse. Applause was sweet.

An elderly lady, who had been a lifelong student of music and who came back to Danville when she was not traveling, told me she still believed the girl's voice was deserving of intelligent help.

"Don't you believe people do what they really want to do?" I said.

"I don't know, my dear, but remember that this girl has no perspective, no background. She could easily be turned one way or the other. A good teacher might do much. She is very impressionable. What a voice she had! I do wish something—"

When I told the girl she sang too much she did not believe me: the applause of the night before rang in her ears. If I told her she must learn to speak English distinctly and correctly, she thought I was reflecting upon her heritage. I saw no way to help her and, besides, I had begun to believe my enthusiasm had been too impulsive, being motivated, perhaps, by some sentimental urge to discover a Marion Talley or a Grace Moore in Danville. I decided that this was just something else not worth much worry. I began to give the girl less serious thought.

But the children's hour was yet to come.

One spring evening the school gave a show for one of its many extra-curricular activities. It was a gala occasion and all the fond parents and dutiful teachers and children packed the hall.

She, of course, was the star.

Having been urged by my superiors to be in evidence, I went with my sister and sat as patiently as anyone might during one of those long amateur performances which are more interesting to the actors and to the actors' proud parents than to less prejudiced witnesses. But I thought the boys and girls were doing rather nobly and, even if I had been possessed by an inexcusable critical urge, I do not know what I could have said. As a matter of fact, though, I said nothing at all concerning the performance. But between the acts, during the lengthy waits, my sister and I discussed some extraneous topic which happened to amuse me and I laughed, not very audibly, not very conspicuously, but there was no denying that I laughed.

Just as that expression of mirth appeared on my face, the prima donna was peeking through the curtains with her eyes in my direction. No star of the Metropolitan was ever more upset. Only with difficulty, soothed by the flattery of the teachers who were in charge and by her adoring fellow-Thespians, could she make herself return to the stage and complete her role as leading songstress.

When the finale was sung and the curtain was drawn she indulged in uncontrolled hysterics which were presided over by sympathetic members of the faculty and student body.

During the next day messenger after messenger came to my classroom to inform me that, as far as a good part of the school was concerned, my name was ruined: the news did not startle me, for I did not think the *Bee*, Governor Pollard, etc., had left much name to ruin. Nevertheless I was curious to know just what I had done this time. Teachers who had been responsible for the show snubbed me in the halls. The directress gave me a murderous look and when I sought to explain that what I had been accused of was untrue, she said, "It's bad enough without you

denying anything. Suppose you worked yourself to death on a show and somebody came along and made fun of it. I suppose all the people who liked it were *wrong* and *you* were *right*." Thus she passed on disdainfully. I felt very badly about her, knowing that since she left the wild excitement of the Methodist College where she studied hard and played not at all, her life had been entirely divided between school and church.

The star was inconsolable. She blubbered and spoke of her hurt feelings with each dramatic gasp. Every outburst ended with, "But I saw you laughin'. And I was doin' the best I could." We could arrive at no conclusion so she returned to the crowds of students who were finding increasing pleasure in the affair as tales were carried from one room to another as fast as childish minds could distort them.

What I suppose was, in scholastic terms, the climax of the drama, came after recess when I returned to my room to find a long anonymous letter on my desk. The communication, stupidly enough, was written in pencil; it was to inform me that I had insulted a lady and was no longer a gentleman and that, from this time forward, I was a variety of undesirable names in the eyes of all the school. Some of the language was so strong I should have hesitated to show it to my little reformed Pearl. Really I did not know what course to pursue, so I went to my superior and showed him the letter.

"You brought this on yourself," he said. "I'll have nothing to do with it."

"Unfortunately I did *not* bring it on myself. Maybe I'm not the most cooperative person around here but I'm sick of being accused of things I haven't done. I was hired to teach and I'm teaching as well as I can. My own students and I get along all right but there's always some nonsense

like this popping out. When the boys threw rotten eggs, remember that I was blamed for telling it around town when all anybody had to do was to look on the office windows and see the stains for themselves. If some people don't stop making the children and their parents think I've committed these crimes, I might as well do something really and get the fun of it. I'm sick and tired of these rumor campaigns—"

Suddenly I realized that I was merely facing a superior smile. I rushed out of the office and upstairs in a rage. I went to an English teacher who was friendly toward me, a countrified girl who was the most likable one of the crowd even if she did get her own English a little twisted. She was sympathetic toward this cause, being slightly influenced by the fact that the administration had rebuked her more than once for dealing too sternly with the taxpayers' darlings. She was a jocular, home-loving soul who hoped to be married to a farmer in the summer and to say a last farewell to *Idylls of the King* and subjunctive moods.

"Just calm yourself a minute," she said. "Let me look over my quiz papers a minute. I betcha my bottom dollar I can find the little devil behind this love note."

She was a fast detective. It was not ten minutes before she had identified the writer as a boy who was failing one of my classes.

"That's bad," she said.

"Very bad. Prominent Pittsylvania family. Prominent father. Prominent mother. Apple of the Administrators' Eye."

We laughed in spite of the prospect.

The writer was summoned to my room. He was one of those upstanding, solemn-faced lads with a sense of duty and the urge to avenge great wrongs. His brown eyes watched the floor, his lean and serious face seemed a little

whiter, for it had not occurred to him that he would have been brought to trial.

"These are ugly words to come from a Hi-Y leader," I said. All of a sudden I discovered that I was getting a morbid satisfaction out of this meeting. "I shouldn't have bothered to trace the letter but I did not want to be suspecting first one student and then another. How surprising that *you* would write such a letter! And that you wouldn't sign your name!"

"I didn't write it by myself."

"No, of course not. You had collaborators, assistants, I mean. With so much help you ought to have written a better letter than you did."

"Two fellows helped me. They feel just like I do—"

"Suppose you get them and let them do their own feeling."

He went out. Shortly he returned with two boys whom I should not have thought of as being involved in this silly affair. One was a meek, pink-faced youth who, although I had been giving him extra help before school at the request of his family, was flunking my course. The other was a large, giggling boy with ruddy jaws and I remembered that he had appeared in the show I was said to have maligned. He was theatre-struck and I thought he was one of my allies because he had hung around my desk frequently since I told him that I had seen Misses Joan Crawford and Clara Bow in the flesh.

So these were the three who chose a short cut to fame as avengers of an insult to a Southern lady. The pink-faced youth and the would-be actor were fairly contrite and subdued but the Hi-Y leader, in spite of a slight nervousness and a disposition to look everywhere except straight ahead, had no intention of admitting defeat. He was even a little bolder, now that we were four instead of two.

Without offering any particular apology, he suggested generously that we drop the matter—not for his sake, but for mine!

"The whole school is down on you," he said.

"And the whole school approves of your actions, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, I believe they do. But I believe it's best to hush the whole matter up and go on like nothing ever happened."

"With one exception we will go on like nothing ever happened. You three are dropped from my rolls. I don't wish to bother with you any more. Somebody else can teach you the subject you had with me."

"But the term's nearly out. We can't change now—"

They rushed out to carry the news to my superior who informed me that I had no authority to take such action. But when the rolls of my classes were called the next day three names were missing. I told the boys that, since they were not given authority to leave my room at the period they were scheduled to be with me, they might study in my room. But my decision remained. I did not teach them. I knew I could not hold my own with the majority of my hundred students if three boys, upheld by higher authorities, got by with their act. I was not afraid of further steps being taken. Outside talk was the bane of a public school official's existence and he would do much to avoid it.

Life went on. The star never forgave me. The directors of the performance spoke icily. The superior, when I bore the glad tidings that I would not be returning for the next session, told me that I was a good teacher as far as the actual instruction was concerned but that I lacked school loyalty and professional spirit and did not cooperate with the administration. But such things could be borne;

after all, I was accustomed to them. My pupils and I, shutting ourselves in with blackboards and desks and books, went steadily along with irregular verbs which we were learning pleasantly by playing some card games which a French professor at the University of Chicago had devised; we studied *Les Fables de la Fontaine* and *Les Contes de Perrault*; when not annoyed by outside forces it was possible to impart a little information without too much unhappiness. . . . But it was not very long before a warm day in June brought release for us all. For some the freedom was only temporary—there would be a study of Methods at the university summer schools and a return to the rut. For me it was the end of this particular brand of trouble.

20

THE garden had never been such a haven. For hours at a stretch I worked in my serpentine borders and when I was healthily exhausted I lay on the grass (attended by an Irish Setter, an English Setter, a Pointer, and the ever-faithful Peke) and looked at this quiet place which seemed so safe and comforting when one came from the town (which had nothing to do with this garden or the library inside the rambling white house—or so, at least, I chose to think). The borders were outlined that summer by pink verbenas and white alyssum; inside the sacred territory of the beds (forbidden to everyone except myself and the Peke, who could walk on the tenderest plants without crushing them) bloomed the Radiance roses and the hybrids we slipped from our friends' fine specimens and a variety of bright annuals which I had raised successfully from Dreer's seeds in spite of my father's insistence that a Southerner should buy everything in the South.

During the hot June evenings and on days when the

garden was invaded by too many talkers, the English Setter and the Pointer went to their retreat under the grape vines while the arrogant Irish Setter and Peke went with me into the house where we could be very private in a room behind the kitchen which I had appropriated because the rest of the family had scorned it, rather agreeing with a friend who classified it unknowingly when she said, "I didn't know your cook stayed on the lot." The rats in the ancient walls and the water bugs and the variously formed and colored insects never bothered me much whereas, if I went into the house among the venerable antiques, there were worse annoyances than bugs. Now in this room, which had become uglier as I tried to improve it, the dogs scratched or slept while I wrote articles to send to a friend in Baltimore whom I had never seen but with whom I carried on what must have seemed to him an endless correspondence. Because we had so many mutual enemies, I thought the sun rose and set in Mr. Mencken. The fact that he never bought one of my youthful articles did not disturb me unbearably and I was pleased enough when he said that he liked parts of my stuff or expressed the view that I might improve with age. The articles were private between him and me and when they came back from Baltimore, as they always did within less than a week, I burned them just as I had burned a quantity of manuscript and a number of stories which may have been just as bad as my queen of the Virginians, Miss Ellen Glasgow, had said they were when she advised me to learn to write before writing. A cousin said along about this time that I would have believed I was illegitimate if Miss Glasgow had told me so. It did not go quite that far but my idolatry, like my antipathies, could be most excessive at times.

Anyway, with article-writing and reading and listening to my elders when they gathered under the mimosa for

their reminiscences, the days slipped into weeks and the weeks into months. The grapes ripened and vanished, their consumption aided by certain visitors who found the time of the Delaware and Brightons a propitious time for their annual visit to our home. Buds of chrysanthemums opened, clematis tangled its feathery white flowers in the crepe myrtle boughs, and Father's *Kathleen Norris* dahlias bloomed gloriously on their tall green stalks.

It was time for me to be doing something. Nobody was pushing me except myself. Father never said anything to me about such things: when I had money I paid board or helped to have the house painted but when I was broke I ate just as many hot rolls and chicken legs as I did when there was no balance in the bank. But sponging on relatives was a habit of our country which I did not like; so I began to consider a variety of schemes. I proposed that I might even go into Father's business; but that idea was promptly scoffed. Well, I had to find some occupation that paid money. For a number of reasons which had nothing to do with the depression and were of no interest to anyone except myself, New York, for the present, was out of the question. I was going to stay in Virginia for a while.

My father was a remarkably understanding man when one considered the fact that he liked golf and hunting and his favorite book was *The Breaking of Dogs*; whereas I liked gardening and quiet hours with such unknowns as Herr Mann of *Buddenbrooks* and other authors whose books Laurence Stallings and other charitable friends would lend or give to me. There was no grieving over the difference in outlook; on the contrary it supplied grim humor both to outsiders and to ourselves. Father told me that at the age of three I had addressed him venomously from behind the safety of my mother's abundant skirts and

had threatened to cut him up and put him in a grave. I never thought such reminiscences so funny but, since a large part of my speech was unacceptable to those I lived with, certainly I could not censor what anyone chose to say.

In spite of what a few people believed and notwithstanding my own declarations when especially provoked, as when he snored viciously during a broadcast of the Philharmonic which I had been looking forward to for weeks, Father and I got along as well as most fathers and sons.

It was Father who said, without any intention of malice, "Why don't you go up to the University and try to get a Ph.D?"

"Well, I *have* got to do *something* and I'm at my wit's end."

"Your Cousin Janet got one when she was getting along in years and most people get them without much trouble. As young and bright as you are, why you ought to be able to get one in no time."

"It takes three years."

"It ought not to take *you* that long." Father always seemed to think that I had unusual capacities of the mind and spirit to make up for the many peculiarities of my make-up. "Maybe you could be an English professor. They say some professors get three or four thousand dollars a year. And you could write, too. How about it?"

"I'll think about it."

"Have you any money now?"

"No, sir."

"Then I'll try to raise a little. I could always trust you to spend no more than you need."

"You flatter me, sir. I spent ten dollars once to go to Washington to see Helen Hayes in 'What Every Woman Knows,' just after you told me to be as economical as I could."

"Oh, well, that wasn't often. That's past, anyway. Now tell me, why couldn't you *sell* some of your writings? Isn't there *anybody* who would buy them?"

It did not really occur to me that there was anybody who would buy them. And it took too many stamps to send them traveling; fat envelopes going back and forth to Baltimore were more than I could afford. But I mailed some more of the "homing pigeons," as Mother termed my literary efforts, and this time I did not send them to Baltimore. This time, too, they did not come home. Instead there were to be nice checks from a Mr. Collins of *The Bookman* and from a Mrs. Meloney of the *Herald Tribune*, who were lifted from obscurity to sudden fame in one Virginia family; we began to commend *The Bookman*, although that difficult journal was already in the last stages of death, and we risked our names as Virginia Democrats by purchasing one of the *Herald Tribunes* which came in at the local news-stand among a great stack of *True Story* and *Liberty* and a fair quantity of the *New York Times*. So easily did the least semblance of prosperity change the habits and opinions of human beings.

When my two checks were counted in, Father did not have to dig so deep into his pockets to send me forth in quest of a doctorate of philosophy from my Alma Mater.

II
ALBEMARLE

II

ALBEMARLE

I

THE journey to Albemarle was broken by a stop-over in Lynchburg, the city of wearisome hills, where I descended from the bus and roamed up and down, mostly up, the familiar streets. What should I do with the afternoon? Perhaps I might search for material relative to Lynchburg's Carter Glass and write an article to help me buy my Ph.D. But, no, that was a hopeless task. If you asked people at the senator's newspaper office or at certain other places you would learn that Mr. Glass was a great man, indeed. But others would speak at length of his bad manners and irritable nature. When I went out on the state highway toward the Glass dairy farm and asked a road man for his opinion I got this for an answer:

He may be a big shot in Washington but he's just like any other man to me and I don't lick nobody's boots. Once we had a piece of road under construction out this way and put up a blockade sign while we was finishin' the job. Folks had to detour a longer way. Well, one day the senator come bustin' along in his car and said to let him pass. We knew who he was but we didn't let on nothin'. We said he'd have to do like everybody else; the road might have looked ready but it won't. He puffed and blowed and snorted. "Let me by, sir," he said. "I'll have you to know I'm *Senator Carter Glass*." Did we let him by? We did not. Did he get mad? I hope

to tell you he did! But who cared? Even if I'd lost my job I be dawg if I was gonna break the rules for any man.

So it went. One man would say Glass was the smartest man in Virginia and another would tell you he was the sourest. Tales of the senator whom I was to admire for several reasons later on were lively and did not sound as though they were invented but my papers would want me to prove that they were true; so I decided that I might as well find some other amusement this cold afternoon besides studying the irritability of Lynchburg's most illustrious son. There were other choices. I might visit the South's great shoe factories or, better still, I might go up on the "Hill" and behold rows of lattice-front houses with feminine eyes peeking from behind gaudy window curtains in hope that another customer had come to shop in a red light district which was famous wherever Southern youths and traveling men had carried their tales of prowess. More properly I could go out to the Methodists' College for women and gaze upon the brick buildings which had sheltered many a Southern school-mistress and housewife and every hundred years or so had harbored some lonely student, like Pearl S. Buck, who would carry the name of R. M. W. C. far and wide.

The shoe factories, the ladies of the evening, and the Methodists' College were rejected. Some capricious notion led me to the imposing white edifice known as the Jones Memorial Library where I was more pleasantly entertained than any words could tell. To begin with, I was hospitably received by a smiling, white-haired Miss Campbell who taught me to doubt that all Southern librarians are ogresses. There was deep-seated prejudice to be overcome. I had known a "grim-faced" librarian not unlike the one Mr. Woolcott described after he had returned from a visit to William and Mary. As a fifteen-year-old

in Danville I had some bouts with a stern spinster who, when I requested Hardy, said, "No, sir, not without written permission from your mother. Anyway, why don't you try this new boys' life of Lee." She was not the only one of her type I had seen and I had begun to think most of our keepers of books were like her.

Miss J. M. Campbell was an elderly lady who was dressed in a smock. She spoke with an un-Virginian accent and she had a sense of humor which did not vanish when I confessed that it was my irreverent purpose to know the history of Mr. George Morgan Jones: a history which, in its final chapter, shows Southern commemoration at its best.

This was my version of the story at the end of an afternoon spent in the Jones Memorial Library:

George Morgan Jones was born at Jeremy's Run, Page County, in 1824. When the war came along he was a clerk in a general store at Luray. For him there was no glamor in strife; military distinctions did not appeal to him. But it was necessary that he shoulder his part of Virginia's duty, so he joined the commissary department which, of all the business of war, was most suited to his quiet nature. After the Surrender he came to Lynchburg and engaged in the sale of wholesale and retail hardware. He was a shrewd tradesman and when coal miners from the western part of the state could not pay cash for supplies, he said, "Well, that's all right, Boys, you give me some stock and I'll give you some shovels and picks."

So, as the years went by, Mr. George Morgan Jones became very rich and Mrs. George Morgan Jones had more money than she could spend. But she really did not know how wealthy she could be until the time came when Mr. Jones passed away as quietly and unobtrusively as he had lived and exchanged poverty for wealth.

After Mr. Jones had been interred and his will had revealed the vast extent of his property which she was to share with the public he had served, Mrs. Jones began to assume an active

role in the city of hills. The Jones Memorial Library was erected and a trained librarian secured by the men appointed to handle the merchant's gifts to the people. The finest of books were bought by the hundreds to fill the shelves of the spacious rooms; the volumes were systematically arranged and classified. All went well until old Mrs. Jones came down from her big Victorian house on a tour of inspection.

The widow was horrified by what she saw.

"Mercy on us!" she cried. "I don't spend my time reading books but I'm a good housekeeper and I know how these books ought to be. Why, they look a sight! Now you get busy and do just like I say. Put all the red books together, all the blue books together, all the green books together, all the colors to themselves. Stack the little books and the big books apart. They look a sight the way you've jumbled them together. Now start right in and do like I say."

She poked around the shelves to find volumes pertaining to Virginia genealogy which were of personal interest to her and on the fly leaves of these books she wrote in a sprawling, childish hand: "These volumes are not allowed to go out of the library. Mrs. George M. Jones." She had screens put up at the back of the main room so she could come down from her near-by residence, even when she wore her wrapper and had her hair in curl papers, and could see without being seen.

The librarian was in despair and when a slight tendency toward revolt could not be curbed another librarian came to arrange the books in colors and sizes and to guard them from the public. The newcomer's life would have been as difficult as that of his predecessor if old Mrs. Jones's interest had not been turned to other schemes.

As time passed she became seized by a sudden and fantastic wish to commemorate her departed spouse. Her course of action was slightly influenced by a long-suppressed dream: always she had admired bold warriors with deep voices and dashing ways—and George Morgan Jones was a meek, gentle little man who, as a Lynchburg lady expressed it, could not possibly have said "boo" to a mouse. Nevertheless, when Mrs. Jones decided to erect statues to the deceased she resolved that

she would make him in stone what he had never been in the flesh.

She sought the services of Solon Borglum who was recommended to her as the best sculptor of the day and she was ready to pay his price as long as she could direct the job. First she sent a likeness of Mr. Jones's face and then, when Borglum wrote back, "What did Mr. Jones wear?," she was well prepared. She called her friend, old Mrs. Mumford, and said, "My dear, won't you lend me the General's Confederate uniform for a while?" Mrs. Mumford assented gladly, thinking that old Mrs. Jones was planning charades for the Daughters of the Confederacy. She did not dream that the sacred raiments were going North to the studio of Solon Borglum. . .

It was a great event when not one but two Mr. Joneses came back to Lynchburg. Mrs. Jones had liked the statue so well that she bought two instead of one.

Either at the Jones Memorial Library or at Randolph-Macon Woman's College the Southern art-lover can go to see a belligerent hero attired in an officer's garb, a formidable sword at his side, his whole being so warlike that the long roll would make him spring from stone and give a loud rebel yell.

Under the figures of the twin statues one reads:

IN HONOR OF GEORGE MORGAN JONES CITIZEN SOLDIER PHILANTHROPIST

Old-timers who used to sit around the Jones hardware store said, "Old Man Jones would be scared to death if he could see hisself all dressed up like a fightin' cock."

But Old Mrs. Jones beamed with the pleasure of success.

It would have been easy to stay longer at the Jones Memorial Library, to explore the Confederate rooms which were overflowing with curios and likenesses of Lee and lesser heroes of the South. But I had to rush on to the station

where I waited a long half hour for the tardy day coach which was to take me to the seat of learning up the way.

We crossed the James, made a long stop for coal amid the freighters of Monroe, then we puffed and blew toward the yellow station of Sweet Briar where a blue and orange bus, attended by a big, swollen-faced man and a measly little woman, was waiting for passengers and parcels from our train.

To speak of Sweet Briar was to speak of the South's most beautiful girls. About the time I got my first long pants my sister and my cousin were coming home for week-ends with college friends as their guests: some of the girls were ineffably lovely and I became all hands and feet in their presence, so bewildering was the sight of three or four uncommonly pretty girls together. Later, at the University, the Sweet Briar belles would be in corners of the gymnasium at dance-time and long lines of stags waited for a few steps of the waltz. Because the girls were best at gay, light talk and were forever raving of their latest proms, many people said they were silly society girls whereas many of them had just as much book sense and more horse sense than their grave neighbors at the Woman's College.

What I wanted to know was whether they were becoming too grave at Sweet Briar now that Senator Glass's erudite Sister Meta had come to rule the beautiful campus in the Blue Ridge hills where the boxwood circle was one of the most magnificent of Virginia's treasures. I had heard that the dignified Dr. Meta, a Woman's College product herself, was making the girls dance less and study more: I shuddered to think that Sweet Briar's May Queen of the future might be one of those sad-eyed maidens who spend too much time on Knowledge and neglect their complexions. But who could tell—perhaps it was right for the girls to take life a little more seriously? Here on this

very wind-swept campus strange things had been known to happen. One year, for instance, while other girls were frolicking with college as a prelude to husbands and babies and afternoon bridge societies, now and then some girl was thinking romantically of a career after Commencement. When the young ladies of the Paints and Patches Society presented "Little Old New York" on October 20, 1927, who would have thought that Katherine Emery, playing the part of Patricia O'Day in an amateur show, was dreaming of Broadway where only seven years later she was to come to notice with "The Children's Hour"? Well, some girls could be pretty and intelligent, too, so it might not be that Dr. Meta would do so much harm to our Southern belles, after all. Some of them, no doubt, would be vastly improved by a touch of learning. . .

Reveries helped time to pass and soon we had left the yellow station of Sweet Briar far behind. We went by Thomas Fortune Ryan's fine estate and on into the higher mountains of an apple-orchard section which was so familiar to me that even the darkness outside could not keep me from knowing how the bare trees along the slopes would look in the gray light of January when there was no sun over the Blue Ridge crests. It was not my country, as the pine woods and broomsedge fields of Pittsylvania were, but it was a country I knew and admired. . .

We were in Charlottesville before I had time to be bored by my own meditations, by conversations in the smoker, or by the spectacular love-making on the seat across the aisle.

3

ALTHOUGH it was customary for persons more or less branded as "graduate students" to reside at the Faculty Apartments or some similar establishment apart from the

carefree youths of the college, I did not feel that my early twenties barred me from returning to the boarding-house on Madison Lane where I had stayed when I, too, had no thoughts of Ph.D.'s to weigh me down with care. I told all the athletes and playboys in the house why I was among them and assured them that I would not cramp their styles; as for the aesthetes, I looked at them with suspicion, according to our old provincial custom, and left them to their modern music and newer poets.

The first morning, well-nourished by a bountiful breakfast in the dining-room of a house whose portraits and furniture spoke eloquently for its past, I began my serious mission. Down Madison Lane, which Old Mrs. Booker on the corner insisted upon speaking of as Booker's Alley, across the street, and up the Lawn, I went toward the edifices which Stanford White must have been right in calling "the most beautiful groups of collegiate buildings in the world." Even in January, when trees were barren and the immense stretch of grass between the two long rows of pavilions was lifeless from cold and frost, the place was so beautiful that it made one hate the thought of returning to ugly towns which had not been blessed with a Jefferson to build them. From the Rotunda steps Cabell Hall was the perfect end of a perfect rectangular world. In front of the white columns Sir Moses Ezekiel's Homer kept his faithful watch while time with new generations of students passed before him. Surely nothing could change here!

At the Graduate House on West Lawn I knocked at the Dean's door and waited for the signal. "Come in!" came a familiar voice after a moment and I turned the brass knob to enter a room stacked with books and theses and ornamented chiefly by a diminutive white-haired man behind an impressive desk.

"Delighted to see you, sir! Delighted to have you back with us. Have a seat, sir, and we'll talk things over. How have you been?"

The manners of the old school gentleman lived at their best in John Calvin Metcalf: an immaculately dressed little man who lifted his glasses with their neat black ribbon and looked at his visitor from gay, sparkling eyes which expressed his insuperable youthfulness—youthfulness that made him talked about in Virginia when at the age of three score plus he married a witty lady in her thirties and caused people to say that he was a romantic comedian which, as everyone knows after reading Miss Glasgow's novel, was not wholly true.

"So you didn't like teaching in a public school? Well, I knew you wouldn't and I told you so, didn't I? And I'm not so sure you really want to get a Ph.D. But we'll have a try at it, if you say so. Anyway, it's nice to have you here."

He must have been a gentlemanly liar, I felt, for my coming could bring him nothing but trouble. When I was an undergraduate he had been my best friend and I had plagued him with demands and complaints. Once it had seemed that I could not get any degree at all. I had finished the Metcalf and Wilson lectures and it was necessary that I pursue English literature with other mentors who were not to my taste any more than I was to theirs.

"I cannot endure three hours a week with Dr. X," I had moaned. "It's too much to ask of anyone."

Even the remembrance of my parents' sacrifice in educating me did not suffice. "No degree would be worth it," I said and I had a funny little notion that Dr. Metcalf thought of himself in the student's shoes. He must have known just as well as I did that the University, like most Southern schools, had to keep certain faculty members

until they died because they were there for sentimental or other reasons and only death could remove them; how they got there was another story which one need not argue. . . . Anyway, Dr. Metcalf began to soften.

"But you must have a certain number of credits," he had said. "We can't break the rules of the university to suit one individual's whims."

I was ready for that.

"Why, that's easy, sir. I'll attend your lectures and Dr. Wilson's lectures for the second time and will read whatever you say and write all the papers you and Dr. Wilson require. Please, sir, you know it will be a better thing for me and for Dr. X, too. Think of *me*, at least. Surely a second dose of you and Dr. Wilson would be better than any amount of Dr. X."

The little gentleman's distinguished countenance had shown the genial smile which made him the most popular of all Virginia teachers.

"Well, I suppose you win, sir," he had chuckled. "You might as well begin by reading all the eighteenth century essayists you didn't read during your first *dose* of me."

That was nothing.

"Gladly, Dr. Metcalf. I'd rather memorize Bacon than spend an hour with Dr. X."

With such memories in mind I felt that my friend, in spite of his welcome, would have been happier to see me as a casual visitor instead of as a candidate for the professorial badge. But he did his duty nobly and outlined a life in the scholarly "fields" before he extended an invitation to Sunday dinner and wished me good-day, much to the relief of a crowd of weary-faced co-eds who were waiting in the hall for an audience with the man whom they seemed to regard as their especial property.

Further down the colonnade I knocked at the white door of another ancient brick house and went into Dr. James Southall Wilson's library to arouse him from his dreams of Poe—the Poe whom he knew so well that the poet was more alive to him than a tall, skinny young man who had come to talk about the serious pursuit of a Ph.D. The father of the *Virginia Quarterly Review* was another small, thin gentleman; he was quiet-voiced and rather abstract-looking in spite of a keen, penetrating glance which was fixed upon you as you talked. For some reason he was generally described as being whimsical, just why I never knew. He was said to be very distraught. One gossip reported that he went to Richmond with his daughters one day and while they were visiting a friend he came home and did not remember the pretty little girls until he reached his own front door at the University. The tale, I believe, was too good to be true. But the fact remained that Dr. Wilson was a dreamer.

My visit that day could not interest him. If I had come to talk about literature of the past, which may have meant Poe, or literature of the present, which meant everybody from Willa Cather to Ernest Hemingway, it would have been different. But the doctorate of philosophy—

"When I was a young man I wanted to be a writer," he mused. "But here I am. Well, I rather like lecturing—"

He would put his small foot up on the side of the lecturn and arrange his frail limbs in agonizingly perilous positions so that we expected him to fall off the platform at any moment while he was lost in clouds of poetry. I had liked some of his lectures: they were sometimes provocative and enlightening but once when he was talking about a great mystery known as Virginia Woolf I saw that the

co-eds of the class bore the same kind of tortured expression which I had seen on the faces of the Shakespearian ladies when I surveyed the Strindbergian drama.

"Now, if you want to be a writer as I did, then teaching is the last thing you ought to do. University life is pleasant but—"

Already my feet were cold. Could it be that I was spending my small checks in a fruitless quest?

4

ONE of the worst things about any Dr. X was that he seldom cut his classes. The rare professor you wanted to hear would go away on trips or lecture tours or merely stay in bed to recuperate from some party of the preceding night. Or he might be like Monsieur Abbot (God bless his memory, for he was the best French teacher anybody could have, knowing as he did many things besides French); some days *Monsieur Abbeau* (of the Virginia Abbots) would be in a very bad humor and prefer to stay at home and cook with his man, Ezekiel, rather than be bothered with a room full of boys most of whom would never learn to speak ten words of French correctly but were good boys all the same. But a Dr. X was always present and punctual. What he lacked in charm—a quality he viewed with suspicion when seen in his less academical brethren of the faculty—he made up for in Efficiency. Bearing his brief-case packed with notes and texts, he came in promptly, wiped his glasses carefully, and made a straightforward, wholly serious attack upon the subject of the hour.

In the precious hours when I was not listening to the Dr. X's who convinced me tragically that I was a shallow, trivial, flippant young man and everything in the world except a Profound and Thorough Scholar, I roamed up and down the brick walks around this place which, as far as the

beauty of its grounds and buildings was concerned, could never be surpassed. Could it be that the place was too beautiful for ordinary life? Because of its perfections one began to look for perfect people to complete the picture.

One afternoon I went to a male tea. In a scholar's apartment youths sprawled about on a bright-colored sofa and sat around the room talking somewhat omnisciently of *Recondite Arts*. They were so afraid they might like something popular! It was distressing, indeed, to hear an angular-faced young gentleman (who wore a coat and trousers of contrasting browns brightened by a green handkerchief and tie) as he deplored the sad state of poetry in America and the wonder of the English Sitwells, Sitwell being the name for a day. What a look I got when I said, "I think Millay is a really fine poet and I don't think you'd ruin your scholarly reputations if you thought so, too! If you had John Donne's name signed to a book of her poems, you'd say they were great and write a thesis about them." Oh, well, I was just one of the great American herd when I talked like that, I was one of the vulgar multitude whom the Aloof Boys could readily dismiss.

Nothing surprised me more than to see how the aesthetes had increased. When I had been an undergraduate—and, after all, that was only a few years before—the boys who played red seal records at tea-time were a small number whom the future lawyers and bankers regarded as freaks. There was a lad with golden curls and flashing raiment who, at the time he was in my classes, confined his interest to Restoration Drama and to certain musicians who were more or less unknown; it was claimed by some who should have known what they were saying, although they may have been somewhat impressed by the boy's very difficult language of polysyllables, that he really did know music. Anyway, it was in the field of musical criticism that he

achieved undying fame at Virginia. He was one of five who were taking a course in the appreciation of Music from Palestrina to Ravel; the other four included a piano student who never spoke, two athletes, and myself. Needless to say, the athletes and I, who did not know a flat from a sharp, were not very inspiring material to the little bearded, sparrow-faced professor who whirled about on his piano stool illustrating the Masters. We, that is to say the athletes and I, laughed at solemn moments of great works and we could not resist mocking poor Professor Y when from time to time some passage would excite him so that he burst forth with a humming through his hirsute nose. Who could have realized that it would be *we* who were to come to the rescue of our Professor Y and that the lad with the golden curls should be the enemy of musical appreciation in the ancient classroom not far from the hallowed dwelling-place of Poe?

But one day Professor Y said, "Gentlemen, I think I shall give you some of my own works. I hope very much that you will like them. They've had some mighty nice things said about them by several critics. But I want to see what *you critics* will have to say."

He began to play ferociously; his sharp, pointed head bobbed up and down; his small yellow hands flew over the keys like lightning; the walls of the ancient classroom shook and we shook with them. The piano student held his protruding chin in his hand and was as non-committal as ever. The two athletes, big husky fellows with ebullient spirits, were accompanying Professor Y by keeping time with their feet and playing imaginary flutes, assistance of which the intensely absorbed performer was unaware. I kept my eyes on Goldie Locks whose gray eyes twinkled with a detached sort of amusement as he puffed languorously on an Egyptian cigarette in a bright purple holder.

Finally the end came with a Liszt-like crash and little Professor Y whirled about on his stool and said breathlessly, "Well, gentlemen, and what do you think?" The piano student was mute. The athletes and I deferred to Goldie Locks who reserved his opinion until it was formally requested by the person concerned.

"And what do *you* think?"

The Egyptian cigarette and the purple holder were abandoned for a moment while an indescribably detached and tolerant voice said, "Very well, Professor Y, since you asked me for a frank opinion, I shall be quite truthful. All your compositions are vulgarly exhibitionistic."

"Vulgarly *what!* vulgarly *what!*" screeched Professor Y, grimly pretending to be amused. "What was the word, gentlemen? It was a new one, wasn't it? Say it again, say it again!"

Goldie Locks was unconcerned. Of necessity the athletes and I came to the rescue, for there was no help coming from the piano student who still sat there holding his protruding chin as though he were carved of stone.

"Why it wasn't 'vulgarly exhibitionistic' at all, Professor Y," I said, thinking with delight that I might get a better grade at the end of the term. "It was just fine. We enjoyed it ever so much, didn't we?"

"Best music since Bach," said the breast-stroke champion.

"Quite so," said the hurdler.

But Goldie Locks bore the superior, infinitely understanding smile of a wise young man among innocent fools. After all, wasn't he one in a million? . . .

"There are not many like him nowadays," I told myself as I walked down Rugby Road after the male tea. Even the aesthetes were marked by quantity instead of quality. Or was it merely that I had already acquired the failing of all alumni, the notion that "nothing is like it was when I was

at school"? Could I be wrong again, for example, in believing that there was nobody left like the Professor from the Middle West?

Walking along as dusk fell over the fine new fraternity houses just across the railroad tracks, I was thinking of other days: and a character from the not very distant past stepped forth so full of life that I felt I might meet him before I reached the boarding-house on Madison Lane where the boys waited in anticipation of the excellent supper they would be complaining of because it was customary to fuss about food at schools. . .

The Professor from the Middle West had come to us from a Northern university and we, the young, provincial-minded boys that we were, could not view him as anything save an eccentric performer who broke the monotony of academic life in the dull season between the games and dances or between Saturday night drunks. He was a large, corpulent man with a very large head and an uncommonly wide mouth. Otherwise his appearance was not arresting: his brown eyes and hair and his respectable features might have allowed him to pass as an inoffensive professor in the Education Department or even as a graduate student in Economics. It was with his speech, his gestures, and his voice that the show began. Everything about these three possessions or attainments made him seem on the verge of flight. His big hands fluttered airily and his voice, that shrill, metallic instrument, so little helped by an acquired broad "A" thought to be especially suitable for life in Virginia, soared higher and higher as the professor's boundless enthusiasm waxed over some new delight.

The professor possessed a lively imagination and, at the same time, no talent for distinguishing factual details from those of fiction. As soon as he came to the Old Dominion after some "enchanted weeks" in England he became en-

amored of the Virginia Legend. All his sympathy was for the aristocrat. He thrived upon the tales of Byrds and Pages and Marshalls and Lewises and Lees. He knew the scions of old Southern families and placed them on pedestals; if a blue-blood happened to be stupid or otherwise generally unpromising as was not infrequently the case, he would have us deal with him less harshly than with sons of the Newer South who, if they were dumb, had no way to redeem themselves. The professor was *enchanted* by a tradition of mint juleps being served by black butlers in white coats to well-bred old gentlemen who lived comfortably (despite a Civil War enacted by silver-stealing Yankees) in beautiful houses full of Chippendale and faded portraits of one's venerable ancestors. It was something he wanted to be a part of, something he wanted to be intimate with; he hated his Illinois, he was ashamed of it. So he decided to do what others had done before him. He changed. He began to be a native of Kentucky whose family had moved to Illinois. But that was not enough. After a visit to Westover-on-the-James, a visit which thrilled him beyond telling (his hands at their wildest and his voice at its highest not being able to portray the grandeur), he came into possession of a grandmother who was a cousin of William Byrd's family and who had belonged naturally to the James River élite until a cruel fate had snatched her away to the distasteful wilds of Illinois. Now this became the most tearful, dramatic, and variously embellished of all the professor's tales; but what of it? People who knew him well and liked him cared little about the relative truth of the tales so long as the professor was amusing—which he usually was.

There never was a stranger combination. He was studiously genteel for a while and then he would burst forth with something which shocked more dignified elements of

Mr. Jefferson's University beyond all enduring. Once, at a faculty reception, he saw for the first time a prominent pedagog who was unfortunately large in the rear region of his anatomy. He was delivering his latest tale to a group of refined ladies and gentlemen when his sharp eye fell upon the pedagogic seat as viewed from behind.

"My God, what an amazing tail!" the professor cried with a wild gasp which more sensitive members of his audience could not forget or forgive.

But until my dying day, I reflected as I turned up the road toward the boarding-house after lingering a while by the bridge over the railroad tracks, I could never excuse myself for having helped to make life difficult for the professor in a place which was to him the equivalent of heaven. I was basely disloyal to someone who never did anything to me other than credit me with laurels which I could never earn on earth. At eighteen I was worshipping the ground Miss Ellen Glasgow walked upon; she was the greatest person I had known at that time and I thought there could be no virtue in any human effort which the critical little lady in Richmond, who was about thrice my age, had not approved. When she told me that the stories my teachers had viewed hopefully were only representative of waste of time I was, of course, ready for an early grave. Then the professor, the good, generous, impulsive professor would not believe such a thing had happened. "I don't believe she was ever so hard-boiled as you say she was," he said. And with that he would begin a campaign which announced that a certain Richmond writer said a certain student was the most promising young man she knew and that fame might take him far if he made the most of his talents. It was impossible to silence the professor when his torrent of enthusiasm was once out of bounds. One could only thank him for allegiance in the face of one's oppressors:

there was no other course and I became accustomed to the fact that one justly critical word from my friend in Richmond would bring me innumerable bouquets from my faithful press agent and protector who was without any doubt one of the kindest and most sympathetic persons in the world. After all his services to me, to think that I could have been so ungrateful as later I seemed to be! And all because of the merest trifle.

One evening I went to the professor's little wistaria-covered house to return some papers which I had graded for him. I had looked for him at the library and at the Colonnade Club but no one had seen him all day. It was feared that he was sick. So I took the papers and went to this quaint house where he lived with his cats, his books, and the draperies and pillows which represented his own talent for decorating; he had told me that, if he was ever without a professorship, he would earn his living either as designer of women's clothes or as interior decorator.

There was a light through the door but my persistent knocking received no answer. I thought he was mistaking me for Goldie Locks or someone else he did not care to see; perhaps he was trying to escape one of those University visits that lasted from one to five hours even without benefit of stimulants. So I kept knocking.

"Let me in, I've brought your papers!" I called. "I haven't come to visit, if that's what's worrying you."

Now the high voice answered: "Oh, it's *you*! Come on in. The door's not locked."

On the inside the room was lighted dimly by a shaded lamp and a small coal fire. Shadows encircled the day-bed and several instants passed before I realized that this was the professor lying amid the gay quilts and pillows. No wonder: never had any mortal been more transformed by one object of apparel. The professor's massive head was

covered by a black silk nightcap tied under his chin by a baby bow which gave a touch of sweetness to the whole effect. The most self-controlled person imaginable would have laughed or, at least, he would have smiled.

"It really isn't funny," said the professor as I betrayed both mirth and astonishment. "I'm ill with a cold. I was even afraid to get out of bed to open the door. I believe the slightest thing would give me pneumonia. I have my cap on to keep cold from my ears and head. Well, I don't know why you keep standing there. Sit down and make yourself entertaining. Tell me about Miss X. I hear she flung another fit. They say some gentle tourist wanted to see the tester bed and the chests of drawers and the thirteen-pane secretary and all the heirlooms from one room to another. She wanted to know what famous X ancestor each piece came from. At last Miss X burst into a temper and said, 'Madam, if you say so, I'll have an inventory taken and furnish you with a list of all our family possessions.' It must have been too terrible for words but honestly I don't see how we can blame Miss X for anything she does or says. Think of anybody with that name—that *distinguished* name—being forced to take in students. The poor soul rushes around madly all morning and, when she tries to get an afternoon's nap, the boys do Charlestons and tangos or stage wrestling meets over her head; and at least once a week they get noisily tight. No wonder she snaps people's heads off when they talk like geese. Underneath she's good as gold. She's generous to a fault. She's been wonderful to you and I think she's very fond of you."

From Miss X the professor moved on from one calamity to another until, after I had offered my services if his own misery should continue, I excused myself and returned to the cold January weather outside.

On my way across the Lawn I had met a faculty mem-

ber who specialized in literature of the past but was ever ready for any choice morsel from contemporary life.

"Yes, he's quite sick with a cold," I said. "And he's all tied up in a *darling* black nightie cap and looks like a cross between a prize-winning baby and Red Riding Hood's grandmother. He looked like this—and he talked like this—"

The imitations were more convincing than descriptions. The faculty member was so amused that I became alarmed and, before I left him, I begged him not to say a word. Of course he made one person swear secrecy and that person made someone else swear secrecy and, when the professor came out again, everyone smiled. He was offered various inducements for pictures of himself in his black nightie cap and he was the target for many jokes. He labored hard to be gentlemanly but he was enraged and he had no further use for me. I had caused students to laugh at him as they laughed at the Rhodes Scholar who had come back to us with an exaggerated English accent after a stay at Oxford. He did not appreciate the service.

Alas now that same cruel fate which visited his James River grandmother had snatched the professor from the gentle atmosphere of our University and carried him back to some forlorn spot beyond the Blue Ridge Hills which he had viewed with such ecstasy when he saw them from the East.

When one remembered some of the professor's major performances these aesthetes I had seen at the male tea were poor actors, indeed, and their private poets and musicians were only bores, bores without any redeeming sins.

5

It was not long before I wished that I were someone besides a graduate student in English: the thought of a thesis on some minor writer long since dead and forgot was unbearable. I had been assigned such a subject for the M. A. preliminary and even so soon I was feeling that all was lost. But the first term's tuition was paid and I felt that I should take my medicine cheerfully; and what was more I did not know any other way to make a living if I failed this time, too.

This was no place for complaining. It was a place for praise and eulogies. When Schumann-Heink came down to sing in Cabell Hall one evening she made a big hit with a little speech about the *be-yoo-ti-ful yewn-i-ver-si-ty* and the *nize, fine* boys; everybody said she was an adorable old lady and they did not care if other singers were younger and fresher of voice. On the other hand, a leading foreign prima donna from the Metropolitan came down only to ruin herself with us by citing the fact that the nearest semblance to a bath adjoining her so-called dressing-room was our Museum which she put to new use while employing a variety of Teutonic oaths to condemn Virginia's lack of conveniences for prima donnas from the Met. Similarly a lady from New England started off on the wrong foot by wishing that a venerable professor emeritus would clean up the weeds and débris in his garden behind the serpentine walls. No one wanted to hear criticisms. When you did not find things altogether to your taste, it was your privilege to leave. There was one course—and only one.

So I went calmly to my classes for a while and gathered my facts and wrote my bibliographies. Only occasionally did I forget. One day, while en route to class, I stopped

at the reading-room and happened to pick up an article on the absurdity of teaching English; it was an amusing piece and I could not refrain from telling the professor about it when I reached the lecture hall; and, alas, once again my sense of humor was cheap and stale. That was enough to squelch me for a while and I listened to the very academical papers with their big words and flowery phrases and wondered why the only ones I liked were the ones the professors scorned; and I wondered too why the mentors did not realize more often that the learned ones had lifted the thoughts of pedagogical books in the library, lifted the thoughts with a change here and there before announcing them as their own scholarly opinions. A course in Graduate English impressed me once and for all time that books were meant to be read more than they were made to be outlined and dissected and paraphrased by the Serious Scholar.

Consolation was found in the hours of freedom during which anything of interest might be happening. The truth was, of course, that I lacked an adequate sense of the academics' past and, though moderately interested in some female out of Maria Edgeworth, I was more concerned with a young professor's wife who was telling me in March that she would be a mother in the fall. "Can you imagine *me* with a baby?" she had said. . .

All evidence of contrast between the past of books and the present we were living in impressed me as never before. Always now it seemed to me that—when among the academics—the world, instead of being with us late and soon, was not with us enough nor we with it. An intelligent woman told me that many of the men she had known during a long residence at the University had come there to escape from a harsher life; it appeared to me that there

was a similar feeling among many students who were seeking a temporary or even a permanent retreat from the world instead of preparing themselves to go back to it.

We would study critically anything except what was immediately around us. We talked about ignorance of the Middle Ages while we were unmindful of the waiting rooms of the hospital clinic which were visited by mountaineers from Shifflett's Hollow who had married among themselves until their degeneracy was commonplace and any pretence of intelligence almost unknown. We preferred to talk about far-away evils, didn't we? When I came to think about it my friends had been curiously disinterested in my strike experiences and most of them, in spite of the much heralded University breadth of view, were as interested in the climate of Ethiopia as they were in the cotton mill and tobacco factory conditions of my town to the south of us. If I had any mind about anything I seemed to lose control of it when I began to listen to the academics.

Sitting in the Graduate House one afternoon, I listened to a man (whose written English was stilted and involved and, it seemed to me, illustrative of every way *not* to write) talk about the principles of composition. Just before coming to the lecture I had been to Professor Pratt's charming little house next door and had seen his energetic New England wife busily typing a travel book which she had written for the benefit of her bank account and for the pleasure of other travelers. She actually wrote and sold books while we listened to this bookish talk about composition. The contrast made one feel a sense of futility that was very depressing.

And, among those who had a professional psychologist's concern over certain characters in the Gothic Novel, how many had heard of the boy, half a mile away from the

Rotunda, who was stranger than the creation of any novelist's mind? This boy was a real problem for all our isms and ologies but nobody seemed to know or care about him except his family and the few physicians who knew about his case.

It was once my good fortune to spend a few months in Henry's home. I would see him in the afternoons and at an evening prayer service which we attended because we were given ice cream and cake after we prayed. Henry was more than twenty but he appeared to be no more than ten years old. He was thin and pale but his lean face bore an expression of perpetual bliss. He had no troubles and many joys. He was both a genius and, well, we might say, a very unusual boy. He could read and write very little and, unless you touched upon his own field of knowledge, your questions received an unfathomable grin. These were his accomplishments: he knew the names of all Episcopal bishops and missionaries, though he could spell none of them. For every visitor he would call his roll of saints, clapping his hands wildly and shouting the hallowed titles with boundless glee. He knew what time every freight and passenger train on the Southern went past without having any idea as to where they came from or whither they were bound. But what was most uncanny was his ability to tell you what day of the week any day of the month would fall on during the year past or present. If you said, for instance, "Tell me, Henry, what day will the Fourth of July come on this year?," he would clap his hands wildly, smile for a few minutes, and then he would say, "Tuesday! Tuesday! Tuesday!" All you had to do was to look on the calendar and find that Tuesday was the day; it was one of those strange phenomena which no man believes until he has seen for himself. Doctors who attended Henry when he was ill were fascinated by the

boy's amazing feats which were all the more impossible to explain when one considered the fact that he could neither add nor subtract and showed little interest in calendars. All I could learn was that Henry had some peculiar system of figuring days and months; what, why, or how no one could tell me. It was a mystery like his flair for birthdays. Henry could remember no names save those of Episcopal divines but he forgot nobody's birthday after the information was once given him. He associated birthdays with faces and when students he knew passed by, instead of saying, "Hello John, hello Russell, hello Paul," he chanted, "Hello April 9th, hello September 21st, hello March 12th."

Henry, I thought in more pessimistic moments, was the perfect example of an extreme specialist and it was a pity that he was not known and studied by more celebrated specialists among whom he lived his happy life of lists and categories.

6

DURING the bright mornings and afternoons when I was not confined by academic tasks I walked up and down the enchanting lanes and paths; I went by the works of architecture which were so sadly perfect to people like myself who would return to less beautiful places to live. There was no sense in trying to describe the University grounds: one might let second-rate poets make fools of themselves, though, now that spring was around the corner and the bewildering influence of a University May not too far off to be borne in mind. Already the grass was regaining its live green and in sheltered spots behind walls and houses early jonquils were in full bloom. Robins flew over a tree hung with wistaria vines; pigeons circled about and settled at last in the magnolia trees beside the Rotunda. The air from the Blue Ridge was fresh and cool.

It was not unnatural to wonder what people did in a place which was outwardly so perfect. Choosing a sunny spot on the Rotunda steps, I sat down and watched students go up and down the arcades and across the Lawn. Occasionally they acknowledged one another with a "Hello, Gentlemen!" or a moderately enthusiastic smile. At more democratic colleges everybody spoke to everybody. Never was it so at the University of Virginia which our generation knew. We never spoke unless we had been formally introduced. A few particular scions had a convenient habit of forgetting non-fraternity and other brands of ne'er-do-wells whom they had been forced to meet. One year I had been introduced to the offspring of an old Alexandria family five times within a few months' period. But this self-conscious boy could not see me on the street: there were six feet three inches of my thin frame but I did not exist. Then the sixth time came. I was in the room of one of the Big Men, a boy who had been to the right school, joined one of the right fraternities, played football, was wealthy and socially presentable with enough money to compensate for lack of blue blood, and in spite of every obstacle was one of the finest fellows I ever knew. Our friendship had begun very casually during the first week of a French class; he happened to be sitting by me when Monsieur Abbot turned fire upon him and I said, "*Je ne sais pas* is your only way out." We became fairly thick, so his room was not the right place for the old Alexandria family to fail to know me for the sixth time.

When the arrogant gentleman came in my friend said to me, "Of course, you know Mr. X?"

Now Mr. X turned upon me with his best fraternity manner.

"Why, yes!" he beamed. "I believe we've met before."

"Yes," I said, "quite often, half a dozen times, I think."

Such small comedies were frequent and no one gave them much thought. A certain amount of our reserve was admirable, I believe, and if the University did not always produce good Rotarians and Elks there were plenty of boys from the little church colleges to take our places. We saved graciousness for people we knew and liked and did very little promiscuous backslapping; whom we knew and liked depended upon individual characters and brains. Perhaps, since I was never among the elect, I should be expected to say that the best of the University men were lonely souls poring over books in the library alcoves or "gumming" together in less fashionable rooms on Fourteenth Street or Dawson's Row but I never thought so and I saw no reason to change my opinion. I believed that there were as many fine boys from the right schools and the right families as from the public schools and families of the up-and-climbing South. There were fools like the Alexandria high-hat, to be sure, but for every one of his type there were other boys who were sensible, gentlemanly, likable, and possessed of characters without which the South would be lost.

Doubtless we were on the whole too complacent and too smug. We were not always so liberal as we thought we were. We used to say quite often, "I wonder what Mr. Jefferson would say about this." But we were curiously inconsistent in remembering the Founder's Examples. In 1928, during the Hoover-Smith campaign, many professors and students had been enraged by the exhibition of religious prejudice. Jefferson's statue was shrouded in crepe and a sign was erected:

TO THE MEMORY OF JEFFERSONIAN
DEMOCRACY AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

DIED IN VIRGINIA, NOVEMBER 6, 1928

It was conceivable that the Father of the University might not have liked many things we did or said but he was too wise to expect posterity to care much for a dead man's requests; he himself said that one generation has no right to bind succeeding generations. So perhaps he might have known that some of us would forget that *the arrogance, assumption, and pretension of the vulgar of whatever station must be checked, that one man is as good as another, that there are no classes or orders of men.* East Range and Miss Betty Booker's fashionable boarding-house were across the street from one another, Mr. Jefferson, but they were worlds apart. It was a long way from St. Anthony's Hall to the Department of Education. Among the students and among the faculty we still had our distinctions, we still had our barriers.

Within one's own circle of acquaintances at the University it was always said that one might do as one chose. But there was still an unwritten law against an offense known as *sticking out your neck*. A person who stuck out his neck by asking a question during a lecture period was silenced by the traditional method of a concerted stamping of feet by the rest of the class. Other tendencies to be conspicuous, eccentric, or otherwise obnoxious in public, were similarly condemned. Especially "gummy" professors and even visiting lecturers were sometimes stamped; few persons or objects were inviolable. It had ever been thus. One warm evening back in the spring of 1876 the Sage of Concord arose in the old Public Hall to speak to the assembled University concerning "The Natural and Permanent Function of the Scholar." According to the students of the time, the voice of Mr. Emerson was so weak and thin that boys on the front row could not understand him well and those at the rear of the auditorium merely saw slow-moving lips; the eyes of the gaunt, weary

speaker were fixed upon his philosophical manuscript. Soon the students became very impatient and began to squirm, to sigh, and to make significant gestures indicative of their pain. Old Dr. Harrison plead for attention but the pandemonium increased and Mr. Emerson began to turn over six pages at a time. He had once remarked that among the students in America there might be four or five worth educating: by the time he was done with "The Natural and Permanent Function of the Scholar" he would doubtless have said that of the four or five worthy lads not one was a son of Virginia.

Students of our day, at least, were alternately dignified and undignified. Strolling along the Lawns and Arcades, boys were reserved and slightly aloof. They hated the collegiate spirit of other American schools. They thought, for instance, that it could be silly to deplore the fact that the University's athletics were bringing her a minimum of fame.

"A university does not need a football team," said the young editor of *College Topics*. "The real problem at Virginia is not to get money to hire more brawn for the football team but to raise the funds to get additional brains for the faculty. Football is a sport and not a problem. It exists at the University for the recreation of those who come here to learn. Students must not relinquish their rights to its enjoyment by giving up their places on the team to the boiler-makers and steel-puddlers who are hired by other universities to win gridiron victories. The great shame of modern colleges is that they produce graduates who are more concerned with the success of alma mater's football team than with alma mater as a spiritual and intellectual force in the culture of society. Would that such graduates had never been enrolled at Virginia!"

We could talk like that and then there would be Saturday

nights and Easter weeks when corn liquor flowed like water, occasions when serious, reserved, socially conventional young gentlemen gave way to childish collegiate drunks who sang "Auld Lang Syne" during small hours after midnight while ladies who kept boarding houses rolled and tossed in their single beds, moaning their sad lot as commercial mothers to the young.

7

At every turn there were ghosts and shadows. Day after day, week after week, I became more conscious of the reflections of the past. The students' rooms along the Ranges were like the slave quarters of Monticello. In one of the rooms on West Range Poe had lived. In another Woodrow Wilson had lived. In another room that boy who —

"Good God!" I thought as I went by the marked places one fine afternoon of gentle breezes and burnished skies. "We are too young to keep thinking of the dead!"

A walk by the chapel faced the magnificent brick house where President Alderman had lived. Tony was dead now, too. It did not seem possible. We never saw much of our president; he was usually up North somewhere, raising more money so we could have more big buildings; a Du Pont of Delaware or somebody was always giving us fat checks. We criticized Tony behind his back and said he ought to get some of the dead wood off the faculty; we could not see why he forgot that Mr. Jefferson said it was better to prefer "foreigners of the first order to natives of the second." We could find fault with him but, alas, when we came in contact with him, upon rare occasions, we forgot any grievance. Like certain Democrats whom he admired, he possessed a personal magnetism which

few could combat. He was handsome, urbane, impressive, and truly eloquent in speech. To me, at least, he seemed to have the same kind of persuasive powers that the Drews and Barrymores had in the theatre. I listened even when I was not convinced. And now to think that he was gone!

Many students never had the luck to meet President Alderman at all. I met him only twice and each of these meetings was unfortunate. One morning I had been in the bookstore at the Corner. I was perusing some volumes I could not afford to buy when suddenly an arm rested on my shoulder. Thinking some familiar nuisance had approached, I said, "Lean on your own dinner."

"Pardon me, sir," came a grandiloquent voice from behind.

I looked up in terror to see the patrician countenance of Edwin Anderson Alderman in the flesh.

"I was just trying to see the title of a book," came the grandiloquent voice again.

"Oh, please excuse me, Dr. Alderman, I just—I thought you were a student."

He waved my rudeness aside graciously. His attitude upon that occasion gave me strength later, as a fourth year student, to approach his office one spring morning to ask him if I might be exempt from Final Day Exercises, since I wanted to sail on an early June boat for my first and only trip abroad. His large eyes turned upon me formidably and his generous cheeks seemed to swell a little as he spoke with a tone of unconcealed dismay.

"Are you graduating, sir?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know that boats will be sailing for Europe every day for every year to come and that one graduates from the University of Virginia but once?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"And still you want to leave before Final Day?"

"Yes, sir, I want to go as soon as I finish my last exam. I get cheaper rates in the tourist class if I go early."

"Then go, if you will, young man. But I should like to inform you that you strike me as being *utterly without sentiment*."

That was the only real conversation I had with the man whose name was more closely associated with the University's history than that of any man since the time of Jefferson. I often wondered what he would be like if one knew him well. I knew only one student who claimed the honor. This was a funny little bespectacled boy who was all brass and no shame. We called him "the Phantom of the Rotunda" both to his face and behind his back; he liked the title as he liked anything that made him conspicuous. The Phantom liked everyone well enough but he preferred the solemn patricians of Delta Psi or D.K.E. whom he slapped on the back familiarly, saluted loudly, and tendered broad grins from the pert round face. Also among his favorites was the president of the University with whom he was said to have some slight connection through influential relatives in the North. Anyway, one day the University was shocked beyond words to hear that the Phantom had breezed into the Sanctum and pushed on past protesting secretaries until he reached the grave gentleman in the inner office.

"Hello, Doc," said the Phantom cheerily, "how's the Boy? Just thought I'd drop by to say howdy-do!"

8

HOURS were rushing by and there were so many pastimes which I preferred to listening to papers on Browning's

The Ring and the Book. What I never seemed to realize was that the trials of cornering a Ph.D. were temporary and that once the badge was won and a berth obtained, one could sit down in peace. I knew some professors with the badge who felt that two lectures delivered from last year's notes constituted enough work for any man's day. You could have an assistant to grade papers and, all in all, if you were not cursed with that peculiar species of academic conscience which made you want to write an occasional foot-noted piece for *Progressive Education* or the *English Journal*, why, then, you might lead the most leisurely life to be found in the South since the passing of the old plantation.

But here I was sitting and talking before I got the badge.

Where, alas, could one find more charming houses in which to spend idle hours? People talked fairly well, they were hospitable, they wanted you to stay longer, to eat something else, or to have another drink. The length of visits seemed unnoticed; it was easy to see how an outsider thought our existence consisted in eating, drinking, and visiting. As a matter of fact many days were occupied by these pastimes and little else.

On many porches and in many living-rooms minutes, hours, afternoons, and evenings went by gaily. Average boys congregated in their rooms and talked about sports; movies; brands of whiskey, cigarettes, and sex; the relative merits of Sweet Briar and Hollins. Lights burned in students' rooms long after midnight.

Aristocratic ladies who took students as paying guests rocked back and forth while they discussed the tricks of the trade:

During the dances you could set up cots in the parlor and put six girls in the room and charge them three dollars a piece if you gave them breakfast; it was a mighty good

way to increase your income ; and you could give up your own bedroom to six more girls and sleep in the kitchen. . . Mrs. Saunders was having turkey every Sunday and ice cream almost daily and, if she continued such practises, she would have a monopoly on all the business. . . What would happen if they kept putting up dormitories and apartment houses to compete with poor women. . . Soft-eyed, soft-voiced, dove-mannered Mrs. X could look at an unrented room in peace now, for she had turned out to be the shrewdest of them all, making her buxom lassie show her best manners to an innocent lad of a student whose father had wealth to get both himself and Mrs. X out of the predicament which this young love had thrust upon them. . .

On and on, hour after hour, rain or shine, while the odors of wholesale cooking in the kitchens permeated the air of all out-of-doors. . .

Between Madison Lane and Elliewood Avenue there was Chancellor Street. A few doors above St. Paul's Church there was a small gate barring entrance to a dark green house with a shining knocker on an unlocked door. He who knocked successfully was fortunate, indeed, for this was the home of the Pages at their best.

The occupants of the dark green house, in order of their appearance, were : Adelaide, an old-fashioned colored woman who opened the door as though each guest might be Thomas Nelson Page come back to life ; a small white dog who jumped up from his cushion by the hearth long enough to bark disgust which Adelaide tried to cover up with profuse apologies ; Mrs. Page who was old but young ; Miss Mildren Nelson Page who was oldish but young.

Mrs. Page promised to stop knitting a while if I came to supper. She never stopped knitting socks any longer than she could help : the socks were for orphans or soldiers

or almost anybody who wanted them but Mrs. Page knitted to be knitting and the socks were secondary. She could knit and talk at the same rate of speed: her eyes, behind the gold-rim specs, were fixed on the racing needles, her small head was still, her black-clad body seemed to be fixed for all time in a comfortable chintz-covered chair by the piano. She flew from one row of stitches to another and from one topic to another. She liked to talk no more than I did, however, and we would fight for the stage which she usually got and deserved, for she was a Mrs. Pepys of the University and was as genuinely entertaining as anyone could be. Though she seldom budged from her corner, she knew everything and everybody and somehow found time to read as much as anyone I knew. She remembered best the books she had read before 1900 but she was not at a loss among the literary products of the moderns. A young writer named Julien Green had lived in the room over her head; she liked the boy well enough before he wrote *The Closed Garden* and she liked him well enough still—and that was that. “He used to say he was going into a monastery,” she would conclude significantly and we would move on to other fields.

My favorite Richmonders were always on her list.

“How’s old Mr. James Branch Cabell?” she would chuckle. “And how’s your dearly beloved Miss Ellen Glasgow and all her ladies and gentlemen who stooped to folly—”

Invariably I would say, “And how is your honorable friend, Miss X?”

Miss X was a lady who had been at the University as long as Mrs. Page had and whose character was generally esteemed. But Miss X and Mrs. Page had eschewed one another’s company for many a month and year. No one knew just why. Some said Mrs. Page had elbowed Miss X

while trying to get to the receiving line at a faculty reception but there were other versions, too. Anyway, the two ladies were not friendly and whenever I said ever so gently, "And how is your honorable friend, Miss X?" Mrs. Page drew herself up stiffly and was dignified and stern.

"I *hear* that Miss X is a good woman," she would say. "But I'll have you to understand that *I do not know her.*"

And so Mrs. Page and I would be sparring at length if Miss Mildred had not come in and put us in our places.

Miss Page was serene, quiet, and possessed of intelligence which was rare among her kind. She had, too, a poise which I never knew to be ruffled save upon two occasions: once when a young instructor took too many cracks at St. Paul of the Hebrews and once, at her Connecticut summer home, when her little white dog made life difficult for her by catching a skunk in the woods by the Saugatuck River and returning with its perfume. Miss Mildred Page could laugh as much as Mrs. Page and I and her poise was not formidable in the least; yet one could not help being a little more restrained by a combination of dignity, wisdom, and charm. When people said that University women were either pretty and brainless or learned and ugly I said, "Maybe you don't know Miss Page?"

9

ALL this was very pleasant but it was not getting me beyond Dr. X to the Ph.D. Certainly I should have been thinking about my thesis.

How did one begin a learned document?

The best way to find out, people said, was to go to the Rotunda to see some foot-prints on the sands of time.

The dissertations of Ph.D.'s who had gone before me were kept in the east wing of the Rotunda in a dark room

with a gray stone floor. The works which represented the life-blood of so many scholarly men and women were bound, catalogued like ordinary books, and arranged on shelves where they had accumulated a thick coat of dust which blew into your face when you pulled a volume from its place of interment.

Certain titles attracted my notice and I dipped into the documents here and there, judging them unfairly by taking parts from the whole and small parts at that.

Here, for instance, was "William Wycherly, Playwright" by Martha Reed. Let us see what this lady has to say, I mused, as I began to read:

The skunk or civet cat is a beautiful creature, yet an unpleasant atmosphere prevents the average person from making a close study of this animal. Thus Restoration stench has held many a man from a complete and fair study of the dramas of William Wycherly. The fatigue of the sense of smell may prove valuable in this case, however, and render it possible for us to discover other things besides unpleasantness. . .

Somehow that was too much for me, so I moved along to "A Practical Guide for Measuring Pupil Progress in English Composition" by Kate Lee Fifer, a volume full of graphs, outlines, and bibliography. Some of Miss Fifer's questions interested me more than the rest of the opus:

1. Is your thought clear? If not, think it out.
2. Have you in every instance used the right word in every place? If not, wrestle with your sentence until it says what you want it to say.
3. Have you misplaced a personal pronoun? If so, put it where it belongs.

On another shelf I neglected "The Sociology of Religion" and opened "Browning's Use of Nature" because a note from Dr. Wilson on the first page commended this work as being "admirably conceived and executed" and I wanted

to see whether that gentleman was being whimsical. I learned that :

Nature to Browning is no exception, no dead mechanism of material property but a system of potential moments. I use the word potential in an Aristotelian, not a pantheistic sense, that is to say . . .

That is to say this was too profound for me. Miss Elsy Tash Sater had *executed* more than I could grasp, so I turned to other shelves for a milder dose of wisdom. "Cicero's Expression of Conditionality in Accusative and Infinitive and in Subjunctive Connections" and other formidable titles were necessarily dismissed but perhaps I could understand "The Historical and Spiritual Origins of Browning's Pompilia" since Dr. X had been settled upon Browning of late for many hours of talk :

The character of Pompilia has beauty best symbolized in an Easter lily. Just so pure and white she is, so delicate and sweet, and just so truly is the heart of her nature pure gold. . .

As a reader on a New York magazine used to tell me, you did not have to eat the whole pound of butter to know whether it was any good. The history of Pompilia may have been all right for others but I turned to Dr. Herbert L. Hughes's "Theory and Practice in the American Novel" which he had dedicated to his wife and which began with promising flourishes. I strove to concentrate upon sentences, even paragraphs of the text :

What is life anyhow? What is its destiny? What does it all mean? . . . Fiction comes out of the fiction writer. It is so to speak his web; thus the quality of the web depends almost entirely upon him who weaves it. . . Henry James was neither a filthy realist, nor a soaring romanticist, but a decent and respectable idealist. . .

Oh, Dr. Hughes, filthy realist that I was, I read your life's work from cover to cover, the only one I did read from cover to cover, and, instead of being enlightened by its decent idealism, I was incredibly depressed by every word. I could remember nothing save your apostrophes when I had finished the last eloquent page. Leaving the dimly lighted room and the dusty shelves to return to a long Lawn with white columns and porticoes glistening beneath an April moon, all I could recall of "Theory and Practice in the American Novel" without referring to the notes in my pocket was, "What is life anyhow? What is its destiny? What does it all mean?"

One meaning was certain, I decided impulsively but irrevocably as I crossed the moonlit Lawn. I could never have a volume to contribute to the shelves in the dark room with the gray stone floor. I could never be a Doctor of Philosophy. Always I should be forced to say apologetically, "No, I could never get further than one degree," just as some of my relatives used to say regretfully, "We were poor after the War and I could never go further than the ordinary public school."

Once again I had failed. Once again people could say, "If you don't stop moving about and stick to something, you'll never amount to a row of pins." It was sad but true. I had come back from New York, I had an opportunity to make \$160 a month at the school and I quit that. I had started the learned life and stopped far short of the goal, a coward before a room full of theses and a mere Dr. X or so. What would become of me?

The future, as Dr. Hughes might have said, was a mystery which I dared not attempt to solve. The immediate present was all that I could stand. How was I going to live this next month? Should I camp on the family again? The ordeal of facing an army of relatives and neighbors

was never pleasant when one had failed. It was hard to go back with nothing in one's basket, not even a Ph.D.

Thank heaven there were usually a few friends among my enemies. Just about this time Julia Peterkin had a new book out and was before the public eye: she had obliged me with a generous account of her life of fishing, hunting, gardening, talking, dancing, down in South Carolina; she even included the victorious encounter with a Baptist parson who wanted to pray for her soul. I wrote all this in a piece and the same Mrs. Meloney who had been a god-send before sent me seventy-five dollars. Now I was relieved again. Seventy-five dollars could go a long way with me.

More than anything else I wanted to do a little more rambling before I returned to the bosom of the family for further conferences on a purpose in life.

First of all I wanted to go to Castle Hill.

10

A FRIEND deposited me at the gate of the main road from Cobham and, with my suitcase dragging at my side, I trudged up the lane through rows of Virginia cedars that led to the double hedge of ancient box which make an entrance to the grounds of Albemarle's loveliest retreat. A shower had freshened each miniature leaf of the high green wall. In the shadows and beneath giant evergreens periwinkle covered the earth with delicate blue flowers. Beyond these shadows and beyond a long stretch of lawn, the South Front of Castle Hill came into view, its red brick and white columns illumined by the afternoon sun.

As many times as I had been to this place it had never seemed so beautiful as it was that bright day in April. The

closed door and the drawn shutters upstairs at the window where the cardinals were fed told me that my coming had not been discovered, so I left my suitcase on the front steps and strolled around the house.

It was hard to say which entrance of this house was more inviting: the North Front, which faced a nearby mountain and which had been built by Thomas Walker in 1765, or the South Front, which faced the boxwood wall and which had been added by Mr. and Mrs. William Cabell Rives in 1824. The wide spread of grass before the older half of the house was sorely familiar ground to me, for one spring afternoon several years before I had recklessly mounted a horse which I was far from capable of riding and, instead of galloping down the lane of red-heart cedars, I had pranced over the perfect turf which had been ready, not only for the annual inspection of mobs of visitors, but for the family's own private battles at croquet. At any other estate I knew in Virginia it would have been impossible to face one's hostess after such a calamity. But here, bad as it was to see the ugly marks of horseshoes ruining once perfect sod, all I was allowed to say was, "God in heaven, look what I've done!" There was time for no bemoaning and no apologies: my host, my hostess, several servants, and I set to work trying to repair the damage—a course which, as my friends knew only too well, was the only way to make us all feel a little more at ease.

"I hope nothing like that happens this week," I thought as I went back to the South portico and called from the hallway to the people upstairs.

Prince Troubetzkoy always had a friendly greeting for his guests. It seemed to me that he would have used his last cordial smile long ago. Guests never ceased to knock at the door of Castle Hill. Automobiles full of tourists

from forty-eight states burst through the boxwood drive to see what they could see and American tourists could be just as pleasant—and just as disagreeable—at home as when they were abroad. Sometimes they were at their worst in Virginia since (like my friend, the Professor from the Middle West) no matter where they were living at the time, their ancestors seemed to have migrated from Old Dominion soil and they seemed to think the story of the migration was of perennial interest. Nobody knows how many ladies had descended from their motors at Castle Hill to say, “Thomas Walker was a relative of mine—” Thomas Walker, like George Washington, seemed to have kin among the American tourists from every county in Virginia and every state in the Union and their history must have been wearisome to a Russian gentleman who, however greatly he had learned to admire this beautiful place in Albemarle, had never forgotten a country of Italian lakes and a particular body of blue water which no blue hills would ever displace in his affection: during dry hot spells of the Virginia summers I thought of him, a swimmer, a boatsman, walking up and down the dusty roads of Albemarle.

Some said the Prince was not always so easy-going. He liked to go about the place with the freedom people enjoyed on private estates in Europe; he wanted to walk out-of-doors barefooted or to eat dandelion leaves or do anything else he chose without being annoyed by the sudden appearance around the drive of some family in a motor who were as glad to see any extraordinary and un-American behavior as they were to visit an historical landmark. A favorite tale in Albemarle was that the Prince got his shotgun upon one occasion and chased down the road a motorist who had stopped his car and, pointing to the Princess Troubetzkoy who was standing at the front door, had

cried, "Look yonder, there she is! And they say she's sixty-five if she's a day!"

More presuming visitors had made themselves a nuisance in Albemarle ever since the time a woman broke a window-pane at Monticello while trying to glimpse Mr. Jefferson at dinner. It may be that the Prince had grown accustomed to the tradition. Maybe he had learned, when opening the door at Castle Hill, to hope for the best while expecting the worst. This meeting of guests was a sore subject for him, anyway. Once the Princess had played a mean joke on her husband. She told him that one of the most beautiful women in America was coming to be her guest. She described an alluring mouth, bewitching eyes, lovely hair and skin, perfect figure; for weeks she talked about the glorious creature. The day came at last and the Prince, much dressed-up to meet the guest, went to the station bright and early. The train stopped to deposit a passenger from the North who was learned, eminent, and esteemed, as far as mind and talents were concerned, but who, when one considered her face and form, could never have caused one slight flutter in the breast of man.

II

THERE he was, the same genial, unaffected host.

"Nice to see you, I'm sure. Delighted to have you! Amélie will come down soon. May I show you to your room?"

Prince Troubetzkoy led the way down the long hallway. I could not help wondering how old he was as he moved briskly before me. He was too active for one to judge his age; his hair was gray but he was youthfully tall and handsome in his English riding-clothes and I knew very well that he had the strength and energy of young

men not a third so old if we judged people by years rather than what they could do or what they thought.

He opened the door of a room at the rear of the first floor and, knowing me from old times as well as he did, he left me alone for a while in these quarters where I had spent pleasant days and nights in spite of the traditional rumors concerning a bed-chamber which seemed harmless enough to unprejudiced eyes. It was what all women would have called a lovely room. The windows, framed by rose-colored draperies, were darkened somewhat by boxtrees outside in which cardinals played noisily but there was compensation enough on the inside to make one satisfied for a while without distant views. The beds and the mirrors and the rugs were as fine as they were old. A bath and a dressing-room were for comfort and a small table between the beds bore a lamp and an assortment of new books and journals. It was a quiet, restful room to have had such a reputation through the state. Not only the Negroes but many white persons believed that the spirit of Mrs. Thomas Walker appeared here during certain nights when happenings in the house displeased her so that she could not sleep comfortably in her grave. The latest legend was that the young French-American, Julien Green, had come to visit the Princess and, while sleeping in one of these beds, had been aroused in the middle of the night by a thin voice which said, "Go away, go away, you are not welcome in this house." It was reported that the young man kept watch until morning when some urgent business broke his visit short and recalled him to a safer room in the Pages' dark green house at the University.

"How could people be so silly?" I had said before Castle Hill gave me my own individual surprise. "It's just that one gets in these venerable beds and begins to think of all the people who have slept within these walls: Jefferson,

James and Dolly Madison, Lafayette, I believe ; even Indian Chief Logan. The British Tarleton drank too many mint juleps here and neglected the business of war while Captain Jouett made his memorable ride. Think of all the British lords and ladies who have slept in this quiet room. That's all there is to it — memories, not ghosts. How could people be so silly ?”

It was never well to mock such things too flippantly. The only psychic experience that ever caused me a moment's worry was associated with this house and with this room. One cold November afternoon, several years before this spring, we were having tea before a blazing log fire in the front living-room when one of the Irish maids came in and announced that “a very old black woman” was in the kitchen and would not leave until she had seen the Princess.

The visitor was summoned. Her name was Alice and she was a fat, dusky Negress with a broad nose and thick, protruding lips which made her look like an immense pig. Brass rings hung from her ears and gold teeth spoke for better days but her clothes were ragged, her shoes were worn and thin, her eyes were sad.

“What's the matter, Alice?” the Princess said quietly. “Get yourself together and tell us what's wrong. Then we'll see what we can do for you.”

“Sweet Princess, ast the Lawd to have mercy on me !” Alice began plaintively. “Alice sho is in one fix. I ain't got no man an' my chillun is gone. I done got so I can't make a livin'. I got misery in my legs an' I can't go to town to work out —”

It had been a long tale but a moving one and, as a result of it, Alice went back to her cabin with clothes, blankets, food, and money. Later investigation proved that her troubles were not feigned and that her life had become

no less unhappy than the miserable existence she described while thawing herself before the wood fire in the living-room at the Castle Hill. She deserved all the help she got. We were all upset by certain things Alice had said and when I went to bed that night I could not forget the ugly, pathetic old woman and her moving tale. When I fell asleep at last I dreamed of a bleak January night. . . Alice was in her cabin alone. She was in bed with "the misery" and did not move quickly enough when her kerosene lamp fell over and set fire to the newspapers which covered the table. The blaze spread to the bed. Then it spread to— A brick chimney was all that was left of the cabin—

I awoke with a start. The windows were rattling and the November wind blew through the boxtrees with a moaning sound, monotonous and low.

"If Mrs. Thomas Walker doesn't come now," I thought, "she's missing a hell of a good chance."

It was the clearest dream I had ever had so I wrote an account of it the next morning and showed it to my host and hostess after lunch. They were both perplexed and amused.

"How morbid of you!" the Princess said with a shudder. "You're as bad as Monsieur Green now. And I'd never have believed that *you* would go psychic on us."

We half forgot the matter. When I returned to the University I tucked the account of the dream away with other papers in a drawer.

December came and I went home for Christmas. Then January came and with it a cold day of sleet and ominous gray skies. I had just returned from a lecture when a special delivery letter arrived from the Princess at Castle Hill.

I have a tragic and amazing thing to tell you. I think I should tell you because it is one of those strange cases of

psychic prevision which we can doubly verify. You have guessed the sorrowful news that I am going to write, I feel sure. As in your dream of last autumn, which you not only related to me but wrote down in the form of a story — Alice's house burned down early this morning and she was burned with it. I am much shaken and can only hope that with her serious heart trouble she fell unconscious while trying to light the fire or carry a lighted lamp from one place to another and died of shock. I won't believe anything else. But the added shudder is that your ghastly dream has come true and at the very time of year that you said it would. You see, she wouldn't accept the offer that Mary Scott made her of a home for the winter, though I was going to pay her board. She hasn't wanted for comforts. Pierre was going to ride there today to see how she was getting on when this dreadful news. . .

People had laughed at the Princess and me but I could not help feeling uncomfortable when I took the manuscript out of the drawer and reviewed the evidence.

But all that seemed far away this bright afternoon in April.

"Maybe I'll have even stranger dreams tonight," I reflected as I finished dressing and left the room. "Maybe I'll wake up and find that I'm a full-fledged Ph.D."

BEFORE supper we sat on the front porch and watched the sunset over the walls of boxwood. After supper we sat in the comfortable chintz-covered chairs in the living-room and Prince Troubetzkoy read aloud in English and French but, in deference to my ignorance, omitted Italian and German. Was there another house in Virginia, I wondered, where people might choose magazines and books from the literature of four or five languages as amusement for an evening? And did any other house in Virginia have

so many good books which were for use and not merely for ornament; bookcases lined the walls of the living-room, the halls, the dining-room, the bedrooms, everywhere in the house except the formal French drawing-room which was a souvenir of William Cabell Rives's days as minister to France. And even this gold and shining room had Parisian gift books on the polished tables.

People often asked me what the Princess Troubetzkoy really looked like and how she talked and what she said; young persons asked me about her frequently, for of all the older persons I have known Amélie Rives as a woman appealed most strongly to youth. Many of us are never worse reporters than when we choose our friends as subjects and try to make them live in print. It is not an easy thing to do. The things people wrote about Amélie Rives never meant much to me and I did not feel that her own work really expressed the charm of her personality. They say Sir Philip Gibbs wrote best of her when he was a young journalist and she was the toast of London society; I never saw his article and I do not know whether he portrayed what we called, for want of better words, the glamor of her mind and person. But most writers presented her as a kind of Edna Wallace Hopper of the aristocracy, dwelling upon the fact that, at about the age of three score years and more, she was incredibly youthful in appearance; they talked about her alluring, long-lashed eyes and her perfect features; they did not write as much as a paragraph without dragging in Oscar Wilde (who, as a matter of fact, *did* introduce her to the young Russian portrait-painter who became her husband) and Lord Curzon (who *was* among her closest friends) and Hardy, Meredith, and James (who were merely three men from a wide circle of associates).

Amélie Rives was the celebrated beauty of her day. In the nineties our mothers in Virginia cut her pictures from

magazines and papers ; they secured copies of the forbidden *The Quick or the Dead* and devoured it on the sly ; they hung over reports of her marriage to that same John Armstrong Chaloner who achieved even more notoriety later when, as an inmate of Bloomingdale Hospital, he added a new sentence to our language when he wired his brother, who had just eloped with an opera star, "Who's loony now?" Then they read of her travels abroad and her marriage to the handsome young Prince. Amélie Rives was forever doing something to astound the people of Virginia : she was disputing Bishop Moore's sermons or entertaining *stage actors* from New York or consorting with royalty and plebeians with equal unconcern. She was as unpredictable as the Virginia weather. What she might do or say next one could not tell. . .

The legends were numerous. All I could say was that the Princess was an amazingly lovely and learned lady whose life had been adventurous and varied and who was tired now and glad to stay at Castle Hill. Being young myself, I was naturally attracted by a genuine and discerning interest in youth which few older people ever have.

"Being such a venerable person," she said, "I am shy of intruding on young people. But I can't help feeling young myself. Perhaps the trouble with some old age is that it keeps young underneath and resents having old machinery to work with."

The Princess never seemed to realize that we never thought of her as old in years. We talked to her as naturally and openly as we would have talked to our contemporaries if they had possessed her tolerance and understanding.

A week at Castle Hill in April passed all too quickly for me. In the morning the Princess had her cups of tea upstairs ; the Prince, incorrigible Russian that he was in some

respects, ate his porridge and dark bread in the dining-room ; and I, the Virginian, had fried apples and scrambled eggs and batter bread. During the day we rode or tramped up the mountain, we played some kind of Italian game with big wooden balls, a game at which I was always the loser and the Princess, to her husband's indignation, was usually the victor. At tea-time the New York papers would arrive and news of politics precipitated violent arguments which I was glad for the supper-bell to end. In the evening the Prince read aloud, his choices ranging from the *Saturday Evening Post* to French poetry in the original. And then we talked. If Dr. X of the University could have talked one tenth as well as my host and hostess the pursuit of a Ph.D. would have been a joyous venture. But Dr. X, in my stubborn opinion, at least, did not talk even a tenth so well as the Prince and Princess and I was not going back to the University. Instead, after amusing days and restful nights which were not disturbed by visits of ghosts to the shadowed room at the North Front, I went reluctantly down the boxwood drive with other scenes before me.

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III
ROCKBRIDGE

III

ROCKBRIDGE

I

THE next stop of my journey was at a place where I had spent a long and difficult winter when I was sixteen years of age. Perhaps it was customary to prefer scenes which recalled happier memories but I could not help believing that there might be some peculiar satisfaction in going back, relatively able-bodied and independent, to a town which could no longer hold me prisoner. Certainly a return to Lexington ought to give me a better perspective of a year of trial and failure at the West Point of the South. Already I had made several attempts to describe the Virginia Military Institute but none had been a success. Once Mr. Mencken made some strong remarks to me concerning the results of allowing education to be handled by "stupid brutes" and he said he hoped I would write what I had described to him in one of my frequent letters from Danville to Baltimore. Miss Glasgow had seemed interested in what I told her about this anomalous school and said she believed that there would be admirable psychology in the story of a sensitive boy condemned to such a school by the good will of his parents; but the story, when written, was very poor and the fireplace was its proper destination. Later I tried again to make a realistic picture of existence at Virginia's famous and yet least known training-place for

men. This time I do not know whether I failed entirely or not. Julia Peterkin's son had been to the Citadel in Charleston (the only other state-supported military college in the country besides V.M.I.), where he was said to have been severely hazed in spite of the fact that he was an athlete; I felt that she would understand what I had written. Mrs. Peterkin read my manuscript while vacationing in Vermont and she said that she liked it and wanted to see it published.

"When I think of the cruelty of adults to the young of their own flesh, I marvel," she wrote. "Why should any of us comment on Hitler's attitude to those in his power? Why discuss Huey Long?"

Two New York publishers read the account. "It's a moving and at times nauseating picture," Alfred Harcourt said, "but I can't conceive a profitable market for it." Then Maxwell Aley read it and said almost the same words. I believed they were right and I put the manuscript away. Doubtless it should have been hidden: it was a bitter, disheartening story and any reader who had heard of the West Point of the South would have had no trouble in identifying my Southern Military Institute as the Virginia Military Institute of Lexington. Fact and fiction were one.

That manuscript was in my mind when I arrived at Lexington late this Saturday night in May and engaged a large, comfortable room for a dollar a day at one of the innumerable tourist homes which abound in the town which everyone who comes to Virginia wants to see. When I got up a little after eight o'clock the narrow streets between the red brick houses and wide shady yards were pervaded by a Sabbath quiet which meant that the Washington and Lee students were sleeping late after their Saturday night festivities and the V.M.I. cadets were in their rooms at barracks preparing for Sunday Morning

Inspection. Few citizens passed me as I walked toward the cemetery which I visited first just as any ordinary tourist would be likely to do.

It was peaceful inside the gate. The new leaves on the trees and the turfed plots were a fresh green; the gravel walks sparkled in the morning sunshine; the lettering on the tombstones was silvery in the glare. Inside his enclosed circle Stonewall Jackson stood on his high white pedestal and looked imperiously over the mountains.

The grave I was looking for was marked simply :

EDWARD WEST NICHOLS

1858-1927

CONNECTED WITH THE VIRGINIA

MILITARY INSTITUTE FOR OVER

50 YEARS

CADET PROFESSOR SUPERINTENDENT

SUPERINTENDENT EMERITUS

For a long time I had wanted to see this tombstone so I could be convinced that Old Nick was really and truly dead. Only a few years before he had been teaching me mathematics: even now I could see him standing before our section of frightened, bewildered Rats who did not yet understand the stern manner or the rougher methods of imparting knowledge. A piece of chalk would crack some poor head. "Wake up, you ignoramus! Sit straight, sir, and hear what I'm telling you." The omnipresent cane poked at my face and I thought my eyes would be punched to destruction. "What branch of the family are you? What? Danville crowd? I reckon I know your Daddy, don't I? Well, are you *bright*, sir?"

It was terrible to be glad that Old Nick could not shout at me from beneath the Rockbridge sod, that he could not throw a stick of chalk at my defenseless head. We all

were sentimental in cemeteries, though, and here I was saying, "He was a very good man in his way . . . in his way."

Outside the gate again, I hurried along the sidewalks toward the Lee Chapel. Now the smell of Sunday breakfasts came from kitchens of boarding-houses: waffles were browning on every stove for the late-sleeping collegians in their easy beds. Little children, clasping hands, appeared from their homes and skipped toward their Sunday Schools. An attractive little boy in a sailor suit eyed me as he passed. I noticed his friendly smile and funny up-turned nose and I said, "When you get big are you going to Washington and Lee?"

"Oh, shucks, no, you know I'm going to be a Keydet!" he asserted with the kind of tolerance children have for the stupid questions of their elders, and then he turned off toward the Presbyterian Church where Jackson used to worship. I went on to the Shrine of the South.

Down the stone steps, at the side entrance of Lee Chapel, I paid a quarter to the shiny-nosed student-in-charge. What a nice, likeable boy he was! The manners of these students were famous. It was said that a big business man stopped by once while touring the South; he was unaware of the Lexington legends which were told him by a student guide. The boy was so chivalrous a host that the capitalist became interested in the school and later gave a fine building to express his gratitude to the friendly student who had opened his eyes to the Lexington of Jackson and Lee.

Some people protested that the good manners of the W. and L. students were affected. Not the manners of this fellow in a new brown suit, this genial boy with his straight black hair brushed carefully to combat the insuperable cow-lick on his admirably formed head! He

was glad to have a visitor who was young enough to need no assistance in walking: being gallant to tottering old ladies and gentlemen who were tearful at the Shrine must have been wearisome at last to any boy, no matter how well-bred he was.

"Ever been in before?"

"Yeah, lots of times. But I want to see the sights again."

"You probably know more about it than I do?"

"Oh, no, not at all. I'm disgracefully ignorant. I can't even name half a dozen Lees."

"Then you *are* ignorant," the boy said in a humorous voice that had not long passed the gosling stage. "Just follow me, and I'll give you my best speel."

He was remarkably well informed. He knew the history of every relic, portrait, and letter; he showed me the general's office furniture, his war belongings, his family treasures, the gruesome skeleton of his good horse, Traveler, and the pew where he worshipped. We saw the tombs where coffins were and the open places awaiting Lees who were still alive; in one unsealed vault a black cat, quite alive and unperturbed, had found a resting place for this warm May morning on the cold stone. It was gruesome.

Then we went back and stood for a few moments before Valentine's recumbent statue of the man who, of all Virginia's heroes, was most slavishly adored. Inside this chapel, near this statue, it would be difficult for any man, regardless of his origin or belief, to be anything but awed.

2

THE shaded walk which bordered the V.M.I. parade ground was quiet: only a few parents, in town to spend Sunday with their sons, strolled about under the maples

near the gray barracks. Inside the quadrangular structure, in the rooms along the four stoops, I knew, from the sound of officers' voices calling orders, that S.M.I. was under way. The windows were open and I could see cadets in coatees standing at attention while the subs looked for flaws which would call for demerits in the office of the commandant. Who the commandant was now I did not know; the one I knew was a West Pointer whom we called "Steel Balls," a man whose thunderous bass voice was like the wrath of an avenging god.

When I had found a stone seat behind the statue of Virginia Mourning Her Dead, a man with a bulbous red nose and many gold teeth approached and spoke with a voice of R's which betrayed the fact that he was not a Southerner.

"When will the boys be coming out?"

"In a little while they'll be forming for Church."

"Forming?"

"Marching, I mean. Cadets march everywhere they go."

"Were you a cadet?"

"Yes, sir, a very poor one, though. One year only."

The man was not disposed to any efforts at levity.

"My boy is here. I've come down from New Jersey to spend the day with him. First time I've been here."

"Does your son like V.M.I.?"

"At first he wanted to leave. But he's better satisfied now. He says they're a little rough on 'Rats,' as they call them. That's good for him. That's why I sent him down here. He was a lazy kid, just shifted along any way or other. I told his mother military training was what he needed and we always heard this was next best to West Point. We didn't want the boy to go in the regular army. . ."

Finally he left me to my reveries and moved away to

view the French cannons and the courtyard where sentinels walked their post.

A little rough on Rats! That was all most fathers knew about hazing at V.M.I. unless they had been cadets themselves and, even if they had worn a uniform and received their share of corporal punishment, they seemed to feel that what had benefited them would benefit their sons. Now, since Major General Lejeune of the Marines had come to head the school, it was said that the Rat system was much less severe. In fact, several boys had told me that the path of the new cadets was becoming too easy and that if the softness increased V.M.I. would no longer be able to say to parents, "Send us your boy and we'll send you back a man." The new superintendent might look hard-boiled and pugnacious but he did not approve of the Rat system in its more brutal form.

But what V.M.I. man could imagine a day at his Alma Mater when Rats would not be "finning out," drawing back their shoulders and holding themselves stiff and straight with their eyes directly in front of them wherever they went? Imagine a time when Rats would not catch glasses at the Mess and fill them with water for their betters. Imagine a time when they would not run errands for old cadets and, when they were gross, attend old cadets' sheenies.

The public knew little about hazing, for it was not discussed outside the family circle. Occasionally some father (who was not a V.M.I. alumnus) would discover that his son had been unnecessarily injured. A few such fathers were difficult to hush. But usually it was acknowledged that the cadet was hurt while scuffling in the gym. When boys were carried to the hospital with injuries deliberately inflicted upon them by other boys at a sheenie it was not a publicity item.

The sheenie was the most glorified of all V.M.I.'s original features for Rats. It was an affair held in honor of the recruits by their old cadet superiors. From personal experience I had learned that there were various kinds of entertainment at a sheenie: sometimes they made you exercise with a rifle, "pushing and pulling" until your last bit of strength was exhausted, and then you might be revived by liquid from one of the tin buckets that stood near the wash-stands in every room. Sometimes they made you stand on tiptoes with your elbows drawn back until you "pooped." But, what was most customary, the Rat merely stood rigidly while his hosts beat him in the sensitive regions of his stomach and pounded his chest. The worst brand of punishment in the history of the Institute was the dark room sheenie: lights were extinguished so the victim could not know who were the owners of the fists that dealt him blows from every side as he entered a dark room without knowing which shadowy corner concealed his enemies. One night in 1920 my own brother emerged from one of these evening functions considerably the worse for wear: a front tooth had been loosened irreparably and he bore an injury that resulted in serious kidney trouble which must have offset the amount of courage a Rat was supposed to gain by taking his beating like a man.

People who were ignorant of the old tradition said, "Why do the Rats stand like punching bags? Why don't they defend themselves?" It was dishonorable to fight back at a sheenie. The idea was that you must take your punishment during your Rat year and, then, when you became an old cadet, you could do unto other Rats what had been done unto you. Occasionally some Rat resisted or fought back: usually this meant that he left school or, if he stayed, he became an outcast—which was to say, in

barracks vernacular, a buzzard. Buzzards usually roomed alone and went to town alone and were looked at askance; they were in the same category as gim-riders, boys who hung around the post surgeon and thought of ailments so they could get out of drill. When I had a breakdown toward the latter part of my year, I joined the gim-riders; a "breakdown" was not a defensible excuse like a fractured knee or syphilis or scarlet fever. So I was something of a buzzard myself.

Rats, with a few exceptions, had to take their medicine and pass their year of trial without complaint. The exceptions were athletes who were too valuable to be exposed to severe treatment and the Chinese cadets who had come to learn American military science and who might have created a problem in international diplomacy if their yellow bellies had been bruised and scarred.

Nearly every year there was a Zau, a Wu, a Peng, a Wen, a Wang, a Chen. They could not be punished corporally by old cadets but there was no law against disciplining the yellow-skin boys in other ways. There was no reason they might not run a sort of Chinese laundry for the benefit of their superiors. If I live to be a thousand I shall not forget one Saturday afternoon when a Third Classman in shorts came to his door and stopped me as I was proceeding toward Jackson Arch.

"Hi, there, you goddam long-legged Mister," he called from the doorway. "Come here and take this damned stuff up to the Chinks."

Clasping an armful of leggings, belts, and dikes, I went back up three flights of steps to a corner suite on the fourth stoop where the foreigners were lodged. When I entered they were already washing over their slop-buckets and basins. They looked up at me with wide but dis-

interested black eyes. One, I recalled, did most of the talking. He spoke with an accent but his speech was less revealing than the shape of his eyes and brow.

"I'm sorry to bring you more work," I said. "You seem to have enough as it is."

The boy gave a funny little chuckle as an answer.

"We expect very much work. I think that is a funny joke, too. We come to America and learn how to be Chinese laundryman. Our fathers would be quite—what you say—*shocked*, I think. They sent us to learn the ways of American scholars and soldiers."

Then a low, chunky boy lifted his hands from the soapy basin a moment; his short, broad nose wrinkled as he spoke.

"The Chinese Rat must not make complaint," he said. "The Chinese Rat must wash clothes but he is more fortunate than United States Rat. He is not hit in stomach—in 'gut,' as you say so funny." The boy laughed aloud. "Customs here very pe-culiar. Whenever I think how new cadets are called 'Rats' I must laugh some more. And I cannot be so serious when the old cadets say, 'Mr. Zau, suck up your god-dam fan-ny.'"

"It's a good thing you have a sense of humor," I said. "I shouldn't think you'd like it here."

The other boy smiled knowingly.

"It is not always what the son likes. It is what the father says is best. My father said to me one morning, 'You will have a fine education in United States. You will go to Virginia Military Institute where you will devote yourself to science of war and book study.' That was in May. And I come to United States in July."

He spread some paper on the table and laid some cross belts on it; then he took a stiff brush and scrubbed briskly. His fellow-countrymen seemed content for him to play the

host. He was the only garrulous Chinese cadet I ever knew.

"My friend comes by California with me. He goes to Columbia University in New York. He writes to say he attends theaters and walks to some Broadway at night and sees many beautiful sights. He meets many students of all lands at a something called 'International House.' Oh, he has a glad time! But what do I write to my friend? I say, 'I march in section all morning and drill all afternoon. I march up and down while old cadets call funny words, very funny words. And I wash many belts and leggings. I run a laundry.' My friend writes back quick, 'What do you mean by what you say about laundry? Is that a joke at your school?'"

The boys were brave sojourners in a strange place. They bowed their glossy black heads over their profitless tasks and they took each new burden as it came. They laughed at their own errors when anyone took the time to explain the customs of the country which they might have violated. One morning a small black-eyed member of the colony went to the hospital to report a bad stomach pain which, he said, made him vomit after the Mess each day. He answered the sick call and marched to the gim's office and went through the usual clinic: "Get your mind off yourself, boy. Don't be a baby, be a real soldier. Stand under a hot shower, take these two white pills. . . ." The Chinese Rat listened carefully but he was greatly perplexed. When he came back to barracks he looked very sick, so the Officer of the Day thought he must have won some exemption from the gruff-voiced gim: certainly the yellow Mister must have got "All Duty" to excuse him from all formations or, at the least, "Military Duty" to excuse him from drill.

"Did the gim give you any duty?" the O. D. said.

"No, sir," said the honey-colored boy, shaking his head sadly. "He only gives me two little white medicines. And I lose these on way. Look everywhere. Can't find—"

The boys from China led a hard life in Virginia at the school of the brave. Sometimes when the winter twilight fell over the Rockbridge hills I thought of the yellow Misters and knew that the ache in their stomachs came from a *mal de pays* which not even a sympathetic doctor could have cured. I knew how distasteful our Mess Hall food must have been to them and how ugly the walls of barracks must have seemed when they were longing bitterly for their far-away homes. Vaguely I pictured a Chinese mother who must be suffering even now at the thought of her own in an alien land.

3

THE sound of a drum in the court-yard disturbed my reflections. The Rats came out of the Arch at first call and went to their companies. The man with the bulbous red nose approached and asked me what was going to happen now.

"They're forming for church," I explained again. "Companies of Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians march together every Sunday."

"My boy's a Methodist," said my acquaintance, displaying his gold dentistry as he spoke.

"Then he's with that great big company over there," I said.

The man thanked me and went to look for his son.

At the last call the old cadets rushed out to form the front ranks. The boys were a rather nice-looking crowd.

The officers strutted about imperially with their swords and sashes; white belts and shining brass were bright over the blue-gray uniforms. Shoes glistened like jewels: V.M.I. gave excellent training in the art of boot-blackening and every cadet handled jet oil, paste, and fuzzy cloths with consummate skill. The blunt toes of the regulation shoes were like silvery mirrors.

Orders boomed forth. Down the road under the arching trees went the denominations: one, two, three, four; eyes ahead; guts in; tails in; everybody in step; hep, two, hep, four. Like a mighty army moves the church of God.

When the four leading brands of believers marched away the only representatives of the corps left in barracks were a few Catholics and Jews. So I could roam around now without disturbing anyone. I went in one of the newer gray stone buildings to see the mementoes and trophies in the Museum. . . Here was the uniform Jackson had worn when he was a member of the V.M.I. faculty, the bullet-pierced rain coat he wore on the fatal day at Chancellorsville. Here was a copy of the photograph of Lee which was taken for Queen Victoria. Here were relics of the cadets' historic charge at New Market. . .

The Museum made me sad in more ways than one. At Lexington one really lived in a Museum. Everywhere stood statues and trophies of wars from 1776 to 1918 and there was space awaiting future keepsakes. The cadets were learning modern methods of military science from the government instructors; this was only an interim of peace which we must use to prepare for the next encounter. There was room for names of many more heroes on the walls of the stately Memorial Garden between barracks and the stadium.

It was fortunate, perhaps, that most cadets were light of heart and mind and were content to let older men make

all their decisions while they took their pleasures wherever they could find them.

Cavalry practice and sham battles and target shooting were good sport; so were hazing and raffling and women. Then, too, there were the genteel hops: cadets in uniform and girls in evening dresses made a pretty show as they danced to the jazz of imported orchestras in a brilliantly decked gymnasium.

Poor Rats again! The new cadets had to be nice to the wall-flowers, the colonels' daughters, the homely sisters, all the sad-eyed maidens. Well did I remember certain interminable rounds with a big, florid-faced, shiny-nosed officer's niece who tried vainly to be popular by employing flattery and Southern baby talk. She sprayed the air when she spoke, her perfume was neither the lily nor the rose, and she was all feet; but she was painfully good-natured, she loved everybody and particularly *the darling Keydets!* All during the hops such Titanics were valiantly steered by Rats who accepted this punishment as part of their year of trial. While they did their duties, the old cadets could have the time of their lives. The upper classmen would never have more fun, not even when they became professional alumni and came back to Alma Mater with fat stomachs and the jovial V.M.I. spirit which were considerably increased by corn or rye.

Yes, there were many kinds of pleasure and excitement. Even when the cadets protested their protest was not without a little fun with the trouble. For example, there were the strikes: when one's brother Rats were shipped for excessively barbarous hazing or for throwing bombs, was it not thrilling to stage a walk-out, even if it was necessary to return meekly to barracks and to receive demerits and penalty tours after one's parents wired the superintendent to exert his authority to the utmost? And every spring,

as surely as the sap rose in the maples by the parade ground, there was an indignant howl at the saltpeter which was put in the Mess Hall food to curb the wayward desires of growing boys; and there was the annual dose of croton oil which for several days kept us running up and down the stoops like so many doctored sheep that we were. Oh, it was a great life!

4

ALMA MATER might never have known how many friends and protectors she had if trouble had not arisen one year to break the daily routine of drills and inspections.

Governor Harry Byrd had decided to make a dangerously progressive move by investigating the status of education in the Old Dominion. He had appointed Professor O'Shea of Wisconsin to head a staff which would make a thorough study of our schools. Since, in the period from 1915 to 1928, V.M.I. had received more than one and a half million dollars from Virginia while, for instance, the Medical College of Virginia had received less than a million, it did not seem too irreverent for our institution of military memories to be surveyed with the rest. But who could have known what the Yankee professors were going to say? Well, they began very gently. They cited the fact that V.M.I. was established in 1839 so that the arsenal at Lexington might be protected and that it had grown as a military training-place and had contributed some eminent men to America at peace and America at war. But . . . It seemed now that the arsenal feature was outmoded and West Point could meet the military needs of the nation and V.M.I. was no longer needed.

During the progress of the survey evidence was derived by the survey staff which further convinced them of the fact that

the Virginia Military Institute is not well adapted to the conditions and needs in Virginia at the present time. A number of cadets were dismissed from the Institute for brutal hazing whereupon the entire student body, except one member, struck in protest against authority. Such a proceeding in a military institution should be convincing evidence to the Virginia people that the claim that the Virginia Military Institute trains men in obedience and respect for authority more fully than other institutions is unfounded. The staff made inquiry of the officers of other state-supported higher institutions and they were unable to learn that brutal hazing is practised in any —

Thus spoke Professor O'Shea and his honest academics. If they had persuaded the *New York Times* to say there was not one drop of blue blood in the city of Richmond, they could not have made the majority of Virginia people more enraged than when they recommended that V.M.I. be discontinued. Alumni in forty-eight states and many foreign countries took up arms. Southern editors foamed at the mouth. O'Shea's criticisms of V.M.I.'s educational facilities were not answered, the fact that the investigators had been given some revealing information by a man who had graduated with honors at V.M.I. and then went to a Northern university to discover that his B.A. from V.M.I. was about as useful as his discarded chevrons — the fact was interpreted to show that the man was a basely disloyal alumnus. The truth of the revelations was not considered. O'Shea, instead of criticizing V.M.I.'s amiable faculty in khaki should have shown that: Jackson taught at V.M.I. in 1851, Lee praised it in 1864, Pershing commended it after 1918, Commander Byrd had been a Keydet and so had many brigadier generals and colonels and captains. Three hundred and fourteen sons of V.M.I. had died on the red fields of battle. Remembering these facts, who but a fool would say that our teachers had made little advance in

higher education and that our blackboard method of instruction was outmoded and absurd?

"Who ever imagined," said a Southern editor who voiced a general opinion, "that the Virginia Military Institute with its sainted traditions, its hallowed past, its service to the Stars and Bars and to the Stars and Stripes, could have been described as an anachronism or an unnecessary expense to the state where it has stood in honor since 1839? If we must economize let us abolish some of our chairs of evolution, anti-Americanism—"

It would have taken many an O'Shea to uproot one stone of the gray walls of barracks. It would have been hardly more futile to talk of moving the great mass of House Mountain which reached toward the western sky.

5

BUT all that had been in 1928 and several springs had passed since that unfortunate time and this warm and placid May in Virginia. But Lexington, of all our places, made me think most of the past.

Although I had spent the night at the tourist home and was contemplating an excellent dinner at the Dutch Inn, my thoughts refused to deal with the present. Before I realized it the Baptist Cadets were returning. So I had spent more than an hour of the sunshiny Sabbath sitting on a stone seat beside the statue of Virginia Mourning Her Dead.

Now that barracks was noisy again with the talk and laughter of cadets, I got up and walked by the open windows on the first stoop where the first classmen enjoyed their special rights. There was not a familiar face and I felt lonely until I began to listen to the V.M.I. language.

The blasphemy of barracks had not changed. Great God, how the cadets could curse! If we learned nothing else, we could never deny that we were masters in the art of swearing before we left Alma Mater: we may not have known French, German, or even English, too well but we knew Cursing with a scientific thoroughness which would have put collegians to shame. "I certify," we would begin and then there would follow a variety of foul words which derived from the ordure, intestinal regions, and indelicate matters popular with young gentlemen in confinement.

The boys who looked at me from the open windows as they unhooked their tight blouses to relax a few minutes before another bugle were not a bad-looking lot: they looked like good material for the army and manufacturing concerns and many activities of the work-a-day world. After all, V.M.I. was a place for squads and companies and, like any other military institution, it was no place for individuals. Now and then, though, some individual would come and stay. For example, there was Cadet Simpson, the sculptor, who won a Prix de Rome. There was a handsome black-haired cadet named Allan Campbell who, instead of wanting to be a marine officer or an engineer, wanted to go on the stage. Cadet Campbell, A. K., would not give up his eccentric ideas and, after he got his diploma and R.O.T.C. commission, he went to New York where his divergence from the V.M.I. ideal steadily increased; he had a part in Noel Coward's "Design for Living" and after that he became Mr. Dorothy Parker. But for every Allan Campbell there were hundreds of boys to keep the hundred per cent American, Southern, and military traditions alive at the gray castle on the hill. Your gentle poet, your dangerous liberal, your enemy of traditions, your weak pacifist would not be happy in the well-drilled corps.

6

THE chief criticism of our West Point of the South came from undesirables like myself. I was one of the dumbest cadets in the history of the Institute. I could not keep step, I never learned to carry a rifle properly or to do the manual of arms without risking my own head and that of anyone near me. Captain Johnson, a large, stern son of Texas, used to invite me to his room after nearly every formation and would beat and shake me ferociously, hoping that I might become a satisfactory unit in the rear rank of Company F.

"You fart up every goddam step we take," he would say between the blows and shakings. "You're the grossest bastard in the corps."

The poor fellow had a hard time. I became worse instead of better. Once there was a field inspection by important emissaries of the War Department and we were out to do our best. We were covered with apparatus: haversacks, cartridge belts, meat cans, bayonets, and all sorts of hardware. The platoons stacked arms and the command of "Unslung Equipment" rang through the air. Just as seven hundred packs were to be unstrapped at one moment, one solitary misfit ruined the precision and grace of an entire regiment: one pack fell from one thin shoulder and the contents spilled all over the ground while the grim West Pointers from Washington beheld the misfortune.

After that Captain Johnson was like fraternity leaders at the University who tried to hide less attractive members of their brotherhood when the chapter was being put to a test during the rushing season; when there was an exhibition he wanted me out of the way. So he decided that I was sick and ought to be at home. He did not seem to realize that the only way I could go home would be in a

coffin : to leave before June would have been an unpardonable disgrace for a boy whose grandfather had graduated honorably in 1858. When my letters were especially gloomy Mother would write that she was sending me some beef cubes to take before drill and that I must pray nightly, as she did, for attainment of the chevrons. She even wrote to the Superintendent who summoned me to his sanctum on Officers' Row. That was an ordeal. I had to dress up in my shiny coatee and appear at the office to go through all the contortions required by the Military Manual for getting in and out of a superior officer's presence. After considerable saluting I heard some grave words concerning duty, military discipline, the flag, and my own unworthiness. There was something strangely lacking in me, no doubt, for I was utterly unable to see that the military upper hand proved anything of much importance and most especially I could not understand why a uniform was supposed to be a satisfactory substitute for brains.

7

A YEAR of cadet life may have seemed interminable but my few days' stay in Lexington as an ordinary tourist was all too brief. The food at the Dutch Inn exemplified Southern cooking at its best and my cheap room was surprisingly comfortable and clean. Although I seldom met anyone I knew, I was not lonely. The weather was glorious and walking about the shady, picturesque town was pastime enough. What I wanted to do was to view spectacles and shrines without being disturbed by thoughts of waste, inefficiency of soldier-pedagogs, the perils of too much commemoration, or anything else. With eyes open and mind closed the hours were pleasantly spent. Full dress parades were beautiful : while the post band played

martial music the cadet companies passed in review before the officers and the crowds of admiring visitors. The shakos were fine and pompous; the guns pointed in unison; the brass plates glistened and the ducks and belts were as white as snow in contrast with the blue-gray coatees and the bright gold braid. It was like watching a dance, though: being an idle spectator was too tame and you wanted to run out on the field and do a little strutting yourself—unless, like me, you were foolishly embittered! There was something contagious in parading to the martial music with gay colors and flags so splendid in the sunset that came from over House Mountain and filtered magically through the green leaves and twigs of the maples.

All day long, while the Washington and Lee boys studied or frolicked about, hatless and carefree, from the drug stores to the movies, while the poor cadets were learning the difference between closed and extended order drills or manipulating machine guns, I sat around enjoying hours of freedom in this mountain town where I had spent such a damnable winter a few years before.

It was Sunday afternoon when I left. The bus station, at the rear of the favorite drug store, was packed and jammed now with students and the keydets who were devoting their Sunday afternoon leave to the consumption of sundaes and sandwiches—delicacies which tasted wonderfully good when one thought of the barracks Mess.

Back in the waiting-room of the bus station the benches were occupied by citizens of Rockbridge and neighboring counties who had come to the big town for the day. Some of them were a mal-nourished woebegone looking lot who reminded me of the laborers I was accustomed to see at the cotton mills at home.

“What time of day is it, Mister?” whined a miserable old woman in a ragged black dress and a little faded brown

hat. I told her the hour. Then she became intimate and told me that she had come to town to see her daughter for the first time in several years.

"That's my oldest gal," she explained. "I got twelve and she's the oldest one. She's allus after me to come to see her but I told her I can't come off and leave her old Daddy and the small chillun. And it frets me so when I do git here! Elviry is up here with all these furriners and she don't go to preachin' like she was raised. The Bible is our soul-feeder and it helps we all to fight the devil. I get so skeered about Elviry. She sucks her baby when she's tired and hongry and she washes herself too much. . . I dunno when I'll git here agin. I been savin' three months to come this time. Well, Elviry says I ought to write more anyhow. But it takes three cents now to mail a letter and I can't do much writin' no-how. The chillun's old Daddy can't write his name but I—"

The old woman was a type as well as an individual and Rockbridge County had many like her. The institutions of learning were not bothered about her much and certainly she was unmindful of them. Ignorance and Enlightenment could live unconcernedly side by side.

The old woman clutched a brown paper bag which contained the belongings she had brought for her visit in the town. When the bus stopped at a little filling station far down the mountainous road she got out and trudged toward a path through the woods. Then we rode on through hillsides covered with laurel and through valleys where cattle grazed closely and farmers seemed to be living none too well.

IV
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I

THE flower market at Broad and Sixth in Richmond was as bright as the stall near the Madeleine in Paris. The prices were not unreasonable, either. For half a dollar I bought a large bunch of pink sweet peas to bear with me far up the wide boulevard and across Grace Street to the Jefferson Hotel. The ornate lobby of that ancient hostelry was a cool retreat from the sun that baked the side-walks outside; the alligators were enjoying the water of their ornamental pools as much as a few elderly ladies and gentlemen were enjoying comfortable seats near the exhibition palms. The season of iced tea and linen suits was with us again and there was less energy than ever; this was a time for more sitting, longer afternoon naps, and a minimum of exertion. The Negro bell boys moved without too much bustle and the girl at the news-stand did not seem to care whether I bought a paper or not so long as she did not have to budge from her chair.

When the clock over the desk said twenty-five minutes past three I went out the back end of the lobby and a short distance up the slightly dilapidated street to Number One West Main. This was a gray stone Virginia-Georgian house with a tall magnolia in its prim front yard and flower boxes at its windows. Nearby were cheap tenements and

garages and unattractive small stores: the ancestral residence of Miss Ellen Glasgow was as detached from its surroundings as its mistress was detached from the majority of citizens who had left the old houses and moved to more fashionable sections of the city.

It was exactly three-thirty when I pulled the brass knocker and the butler admitted me to the wide hall. When Miss Glasgow set a specific hour I abided by it; she had said to come at three-thirty and to stay no longer than one hour. The first intellectual lady of Virginia—or should one say of the South?—was not one to be easily flattered by the adulation of young people with literary inclinations who sought her favor. She did not cultivate satellites and cliques. She needed no champions. It might have irritated her to know that I had once engaged in a lively argument with Dr. Phelps because he had selected a “Big Six” from American women novelists for his feminine audience and had omitted Ellen Glasgow. “I admire Ellen Glasgow and her works,” he had said, “but in my eyes (astigmatic?) she is not quite up to the Big Six.” Miss Glasgow would not have liked being drawn into such a discussion and she would have more than told me so if she had heard of the affair; she felt, I think, that just such immature behavior as this outweighed the so-called enthusiasm and freshness of the young. I think that she preferred the society of her wiser contemporaries if there had to be any society at all. . . .

The library of One West Main, like the other rooms, was filled with soft colors and polished surfaces. The Chippendales, the Sheratons, the steel engravings, the many shelves of classics in sets, the work of St. Memin were where they had been for a long time. Miss Glasgow may never have conformed in her thinking but her house was representative of Virginia houses at their best just as her

table proved that she was a fine Southern housekeeper even if she did write all morning while other ladies could visit their cooks between calls and games of bridge. It was a friendly house, too; even the drawing-room looked as though people had lived in it and not kept it for special occasions as some of our families did with their formal chambers.

Most inviting was a back porch which led to a walled garden shaded by evergreens and myrtles. By the flower beds there was buried Jeremy, a Sealyham, whose almost human personality was celebrated throughout the town. Miss Glasgow talked about dogs as though they might have been human beings and I am sure she preferred the company of Billy, her French poodle, to most two-legged mortals. Right now, while I was waiting for her, I could hear her penetrating voice upstairs. "Come darling, come darling, come my Billy." If I had not known I might have thought this sounded like a mother talking to her favorite child; but I had been to this enchanting house before and I knew that Miss Glasgow's sentimental mood was most likely to be aroused by some member of the four-legged kingdom in whose cause she had been fighting for many years.

Billy came dashing down the polished stairway to inform me that I was to follow him back up the steps. It was to be expected, I thought, that the dogs in this house should have a superior intelligence as well as a sprightly manner.

Billy's adored mistress was in her study; a page of her own zigzagged typing was in the upright machine on a table which was the only business-like touch in a cheerful room of old furniture and pictures and books; the fragrance of flowers was heavy already and now my sweet peas were added to the bowls of cape jessamines and roses on the mantel and the desk.

Although Miss Glasgow never seemed to me to make as many conscious efforts to achieve a youthful appearance as some of her contemporaries did, she was a young-looking woman to have been in her fifties and to have been ill much of her life. She was not beautiful and I think it was silly of some of her friends and reporters to say that she was. God had given Ellen Glasgow enough without anyone needing to add a schoolgirl complexion or glorious bronze hair. Her one real secret of personal charm was not associated with the details of her physical appearance, the petite figure and almost doll-like round face; it was in her smile, a smile that was actually radiant, for her eyes brightened ineffably when she smiled. And she smiled frequently, even when she said things that were as disturbing as they were true. Old Mr. Hamlin Garland had been impressed a quarter of a century before as I was now. He had visited this house when Ellen Glasgow was a novelist in her early twenties and had said that he was surprised to find a Virginia girl who talked about Spencer and Darwin with alarming candor and had confessed that she was irritated by happy people—all this, though, with a lovely smile! Even then people did not realize that gaiety of manner can be an effective mask. Because Miss Glasgow was wittier than any character in her novels, because she laughed lightly and dressed brightly, superficial impressions got abroad that she was in many ways a frivolous person. With all deference to her skill at comedy, she was probably the least frivolous woman in the history of Virginia.

Her voice in conversation was emphatic and her patrician broad A's were pronounced with a marked precision. Sometimes her voice was higher or more metallic than she intended it to be. There was a reason for this which many of her readers did not know. Although America knew that Booth Tarkington had trouble with his eyes, that

Laurence Stallings had been badly wounded in the war, that various literary figures had various afflictions, few readers knew that Miss Glasgow was quite deaf. She did not refer to her loss of hearing and did not seem to think it a matter of interest to anyone else. It really was, though, because, as Mr. Cabell told me once, it was remarkable that Miss Glasgow was so fine a novelist when she could never listen normally to the ordinary talk of people around her. She listened to one person at a time by means of a phone into which one talked while she held it before her; she never heard the casual conversations of groups; but I knew that she observed all the more keenly with her eyes and could have accomplished minus one faculty more than most writers could with all their senses intact.

2

THAT afternoon I was asking her questions about writing. We sat on a sofa and the little phone, which was attached to the novelist's ear, rested on a pillow in her lap.

Miss Glasgow knew more about books than any woman I have known. Her memory was phenomenal and she quoted poetry and even prose passages which she recollected without making any effort to tax her mind. The moderns she talked about most were people like Proust and Virginia Woolf but if anybody had written a book of any consequence which she was unaware of I do not know who it was. Sometimes I thought her preferences were exclusively literary; now and then I felt that she endorsed the work of some woman writer or some man who wrote for women with a fervor which was more than I could understand since she was one writer who was said to have no part in the log-rolling of New York. She was such a dynamic person that anyone who was still in a formative

stage was likely to feel that it was an admission of weakness to disagree with her.

Sometimes I thought Miss Glasgow was too much the Virginia lady to be a candid critic outside her novels; on the other hand she felt no doubt that I was too close to what she called the inspired amateurs and infant pathologists. Once, after showing me quite clearly how I had failed in an attempt to appreciate a certain subject, she said tolerantly, "Don't worry, my dear, youth is a fault that corrects itself even while we sleep." Constantly I feared that I might provoke similar words of pardon.

Of course it was absurd for me to argue with Miss Glasgow but I did all the same. Sometimes I needed support. I hoped Tom Wolfe would come to Virginia so I could take him to Miss Glasgow as a spokesman for a trend of Southern thinking which she did not understand completely and Wolfe, unless he found it necessary to be mute and glaring, would talk as she had never heard any young Southerner talk before. I do not mean to say that Wolfe would have offended her for, when he had been to a home in New York with me, he was more gentlemanly to my mind than many aristocratic scions in our part of the world whom I should have been championing—or so, at least, said some of the elders. Miss Glasgow, like most lady novelists, talked about the point of view in novels: Wolfe had another point of view in life, whatever his point of view in the novel may or may not have been. I felt that Miss Glasgow was not especially interested in the kind of writing most young men in the South were trying to do.

"I do not mean that writing must be distinguished," she protested when I told her she liked one style most. "I prefer distinction but I know good writing even when it is rough and brutal and vulgar. What I insist upon is that

you choose your form of thought and hold to it as far as possible."

But the rough writing to her taste was rare indeed. She continued to prefer distinction. She was a stern critic of all writing, including her own, and was continually wishing that she might disown some of her earlier books. She considered her youthful ventures unsuccessful; yet she could not overlook the fact that so many of the younger writers produced such imperfect words. It is a pity that she could not have lectured more of the young hopefuls who would never get anywhere, for she could have frightened most of them out of their literary aspirations and saved them and their indulgent families considerable trouble. I knew from experience: even when I was trying to do a pedestrian piece for a daily newspaper to earn a few needed dollars she expected me to strive for a degree of excellence which few could achieve. And what she said about a silly "love" story I had written ought to be recorded just as it was and well remembered in the South.

"You care so much about writing that you ought to be able to write," she said. "Now leave love stories alone. There is some weakness in Southern writers, especially in young Southern writers and especially in young Southern *men* writers that makes it dangerous for them to approach the subject of love until they have suffered from the malady and have entirely recovered. Suffering from it doesn't help unless they recover completely. . . Why not devote a few months to stern discipline and learn to write before writing? I do not wish to seem discouraging. Life is sufficiently hard without that. Only the best way seems to be the straightest way when one is giving advice."

She chose the straightest way. There was no doubt about that. And her counsel was like a strong tonic if

your system was stout enough to stand it. But she had been my good friend, even when I was youthfully boring and immature, and she was one person I knew in Virginia who would have found it impossible to look anyone straight in the eye and say anything that was insincere. She was so sincere, on the contrary, that she sometimes frightened conventionally evasive souls out of their meager wits. Some found her statements of belief alarming. There were many tales of what she said in dispraise of this life, this world, this planet, this age. Once, at a party in Richmond, I heard a lady say that Miss Glasgow, after brooding over some horrible tragedy which was on the front pages of the papers at the time, had declared that she would like nothing more than the power to obliterate this globe with all its troubles. "Do you believe Ellen said that?" the narrator asked me. She was a charming lady who went to St. James's on Sunday and from one gathering to another during the week. "I don't know whether she said exactly that or not," I replied. "But sometimes she can be more gloomy than the Russians in their darkest hours. I have heard her quote whoever it was who said: 'Most thinking men live in a state of quiet desperation.' She smiles, though, when she says such things. Anyway, I don't see why every word she says should be regarded too seriously by her admirers. She may find this earth not to her liking but she takes considerable trouble to prolong her days here. Wasn't it A. E. Housman who talked so sourly while wrapped up in a muffler lest he catch cold and risk his health?"

"Ellen certainly takes good care of *her* health," said the lady. "The best of doctors, rest, every precaution—"

The lady would not have said that to Miss Glasgow, of course. It was significant that a woman who was extraordinarily frank herself should cause other people to be re-

served in their speech with her. She inspired unusual reserve on the part of interviews and essayists; even Emily Clark, who wrote about her better than anyone else did, talked about her infinitely better than she wrote about her. Miss Glasgow was an important figure in the South but she insisted upon the privacy of a hermit! Fame! Pshaw! Didn't Marcus Aurelius say a name is but a sound and an echo? Why did people need to know anything about a woman just because she wrote novels?

One West Main had known some famous parties in its time and Mr. Cabell said that an account of these affairs would make interesting reading. Miss Glasgow, however, would not consider such publicity any more than she would think of a story in a popular magazine or a scenario for the movies. I remembered that I had suggested one of Miss Glasgow's books to a movie official once and that shrewd official had said, "They say you can't even ask her. She'd be insulted!"

When a New York editor asked me to write a piece about her she consented reluctantly because I needed the money. I attempted the project fearfully and failed dismally. Miss Glasgow read the manuscript and, after saying, "You will wish to murder me," she ripped the article to shreds, which I did not mind except that I needed the hundred dollars the editor might have paid. "So much that can be said lightly appears too serious or too unreal when it is put into print," she said and I daresay she was right, although I could not cease to believe that it is natural for the public to have a reasonable amount of curiosity about men and women who have become public figures. I cannot imagine what she would have said or thought if she had heard her small but talkative circle of readers in Virginia wondering how she knew so much about men, what she really thought of Hugh Walpole, whether she

really shared some of the frightful views of characters in her books.

But she was not bothered by people much. She didn't have to see them at movies and theatres which other people attended and she did not have to hear them over the radio or by way of other enemies of "the lost mood of contemplation" which she spoke of so often. They did not come to One West Main unless they were invited and when they did, as in my case, she could tell them when to leave. She was saving her thought and energy for her work. Work came first. She lived wholly with each book she was doing. "After three years of work my book has just gone to the publishers," she wrote me when she had completed *The Sheltered Life*. "I feel as though the end of my world has come. *The Sheltered Life* which I have lived with for all those years does not belong to me now."

Already she was becoming absorbed in another world of her own creation and after three more years of Flaubert-like searching for the *mot juste* would be bidding farewell to another manuscript which would bring enviable royalties and more prestige in return. . . .

It seemed to me that an hour with Miss Glasgow was worth days with most other people and I felt that knowing her was the most fortunate thing that could happen to any young Virginian.

3

At four-thirty I was going to see the author of *Jurgen*. Miss Glasgow offered to drive me to the Cabells' on her way to the country, so we went downstairs and out of the little yard inside the iron fence toward her car. We were accompanied now by a pleasant lady, who was visiting at One West Main, and preceded, of course, by Billy. The chauffeur opened the door. Billy entered first and occu-

pied a large part of the back seat and then permitted his doting owner and her friend to sit down as well as they could while he peered haughtily through the closed window. He openly resented my presence on one of the little folding stools in front of him but managed to control himself until I made adieus and got out at an inconspicuous brick house on Monument Avenue which was my destination.

If I had thought much about recent statements of Mr. Cabell concerning obnoxious visitors who disturbed his cheerful solitude, it would have seemed presumptuous to ring his bell. But, again, I needed to raise seventy-five dollars and an article on this author was timely now since, after devoting nearly thirty years to the eighteen volumes of his *Biography of Manuel* (the longest piece of fiction with one protagonist ever concocted in America), he had decided to abandon the writing of fiction; he had announced, too, that he had decided to shorten his name. He was no longer to be James Branch Cabell. He was Branch Cabell.

The Negro servant knew I was coming, so he admitted me to the homelike interior and showed me upstairs to the library adjoining the writing-room which Mr. Cabell called "a mere pill-box" because of its small dimensions. There my host stood waiting: a medium, stocky figure with a finely molded head, a broad forehead, and strangely non-committal eyes. He was scholarly-looking and dignified of manner. There were no ear-marks of the Artist; he might have been the president of the First National Bank or senior warden at St. James's Church. His voice was low and sensitive and his speech was almost painfully deliberate and careful. The man who was so frank in his books was shy in person and such interviews as this must have been painful necessities; yet some said nobody liked

publicity better than did the author of *Jurgen*. I had a pad and pencil and was the professional interviewer with questions ready to open fire. I told the grave, unsmiling gentleman to curb my impertinence when he saw fit but, to my amazement, he met each inquiry calmly and showed no sign of being displeased.

"Some of your readers think you are a social recluse, Mr. Cabell, the kind of recluse, you know, who is tortured over many aspects of modern life."

He was silent for a moment while the smoke of his cigarette curled upward. Then he spoke quietly and with a formality which I have never seen in any other man in Virginia: "It is true that I stay here in Richmond, here in my own home, most of the time. I haven't been to Europe for over twenty years—not since I was married, in fact. I go to New York on business once or twice a year and I go to Mountain Lake in the summer. The rest of the time I'm here. As for 'modern life,' I must confess that I listen to Amos and Andy over the radio and my wife and I go to the movies once or twice every week. Some writers say they find movies distasteful because of their distorted views on life or perverted humor. But the movies are all that we have here and I mildly enjoy them."

"What of music? There are concerts here occasionally."

"Music means nothing to me. The arts of literature and music are very different. Music, I am told, is based upon harmony, whereas prose, I know, is based upon variety. It follows that nobody who takes prose seriously can enjoy music, though he retains, of course, the invaluable privilege of lying about it—"

That was hard to swallow, I thought. Miss Willa Cather, for example, enjoyed music as much as anyone and no one could say truthfully that *she* failed to take prose

seriously. Writers seemed to be uncommonly suspicious of one another's actions and opinions. While Mr. Cabell was thinking that some of his literary brethren and sisters were affected in their love of Verdi they were questioning some of his loyalties. For instance, there was his allegiance to the Episcopal ritual. Miss Glasgow had said, "The funniest word James ever wrote was the word 'Episcopalian' in 'Who's Who.'" Mr. Cabell professed to be perplexed at this but Miss Glasgow did not retract her statement. "I have always been an Episcopalian," he had said, "and have found in no pulpit any really sufficient reason for me to cease being one." Some of his characters spoke in dispraise of organized religions, he admitted, but his personal beliefs were not to be confused with the views of people in his novels. He referred humorously to Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin's statement that "an admired writer like Cabell views man as a parasite infesting the epidermis of a midge among the planets." This pessimism, of course, had been lifted from one of the novels.

"I should hate to think I am responsible for all the views of all my characters," Mr. Cabell said, "but it seems that I am responsible only for the obtuseness of my readers. . ."

The obtuseness of his readers afforded him considerable pleasure. Once I had given him an article about his work which I had found in our Danville paper, an article which he added to his extensive collection of documents expressing misunderstanding of the works of Cabell. "This clipping is of real interest," he said as though I might have sent him something flattering instead of destructive. "I have not yet divined just what it is about, but I marvel how anybody could be moved to write thus extensively about a book which he had quite obviously never seen."

While Mr. Cabell talked quietly and seriously and carefully, I was looking about the room. There were many

books, a large number of which were written by himself; a bust of Mother Sereda; a display of more than a hundred small brass and china animals; two maps of his mythical Poictesme; and, somewhat incongruously, a radio. From the window one looked out upon the cool green of periwinkle and laurel in a hedged-in yard; in the street outside of the iron fence, which had been brought from his boyhood home on Franklin Street, limousines rushed back and forth where carriages had rolled by leisurely in a vanished day.

Inside this quiet room this strange combination of a Virginia gentleman and an unconventional novelist spoke of the affairs of his mimic world and of characters who seemed to be alive to him in the sense that dolls are alive to an imaginative child. He was dreaming much of the time. He did not belong wholly to the modern world and yet he had a lot of fun in poking fun at it and in keeping those of its citizens who were aware of him baffled and perplexed.

He was absorbed in his own activities. He did not know what most of the young writers were doing and he did not seem to care. He did not seem particularly concerned about the older writers, either. He made an exception for Miss Glasgow, though her books were not the kind of romances he preferred.

"But we have both sprung from the same environment, whether as products or protests," he mused, "and that makes a large difference, after all."

His disagreements with his friend were good-natured. It was at one of his infrequent "at homes" that he said to her, "Ellen, it seems to me that your ladies do not always behave like gentlemen."

"But, James," Miss Glasgow retorted quickly, "I am sure that your gentlemen are very often ladies."

Neither Mr. Cabell's friends nor his enemies really seemed to disturb him much. Most of the time he was peacefully secluded within this library and "the pill-box" where he wrote; this was in spite of the fact that he lived in a gregarious city where the desire of privacy was a social affront and a sign of queeriness. But, if he had gone about, it was not likely that many people would have been interested in the things which attracted him.

"I have never believed that the ability to write well is a gift of the gods," he was telling me now. "When one talks of a natural style that of course means nothing except that the speaker is not especially intelligent—"

In truth Mr. Cabell was scholarly, impersonal, solitary; he was reticent and self-conscious in most society. He belonged in his library and pill-box with his own amusements. When his efforts to be sociable were mentioned I recalled the description of how dignified he had looked at a picnic on a grassy river bank and how Hergesheimer had said to him, "How can you look so much as if you were in a drawing-room, James? You are on a picnic!" Mr. Cabell gave the impression that he was serious-minded most of the time. He was solemn even now when the "chief of the defense mechanism," his wife, came in to bring some of the Ravished Virgin cocktails which he had mentioned in the later books about himself. Mrs. Cabell was a practical, sociable woman who had done much to make it possible for her husband to stay at home to write books which were not always very remunerative.

After consuming one of the drinks and while Mrs. Cabell was out of hearing, I said, "Is Mrs. Cabell interested in your novels?" His wife came back before there was time to reply. "I was just asked whether you are interested in my work," he said.

"Well, I'm glad I didn't hear the answer," Mrs. Cabell

replied charmingly. But the answer had not been made and, if it had been made at that moment, I might not have remembered for, after a long period of abstemiousness, the famous Cabell cocktail made my head whirl considerably. With difficulty I said good-bye, got out of the house as well as I could, and searched frantically for a downtown bus.

4

BEFORE returning to my room with running water and no bath at a hotel that suited my pocket-book more than it pleased my tastes I got a sobering tomato sandwich at a drug store and then I walked through Capitol Park. Back at one corner of the great enclosure, away from the larger buildings, there was the gubernatorial mansion, an ancient and perfect residence with boxwood and evergreens in its formal yard. There reigned Governor Pollard, the Mediator of Strikes. It was not a place for me.

Along the driveways and paths, benches under the giant trees were occupied by down-and-outs. Richmond had much unemployment at this time and the bounty of C.W.A. had not begun. Nowhere, not in Central Park, not in the square by the Tour Eiffel, had I seen more pitiable or more sickening specimens of society. A bus driver had commented upon the unusually large assembly this evening and had told me that this section of the city was a meeting-place for every variety of bum and whore and I believe he was right. It was illuminating, perhaps, to talk to some of these people; certainly it gave a contrasting perspective after leaving the libraries of two novelists, a lady and a gentleman, whose aristocratic homes belonged in another world. Near a statue of a revered Southerner, a stupid-eyed boy with greasy black hair and an obvious type of handsome dark face began a conversation by asking for a

match and soon proceeded to avow that there was *nothing* he would not do to make a dollar; he gave me a bad case of the creeps and I wondered why our people believed that degeneracy was confined to larger cities of the North or why the pictures of Messrs. Faulkner and Caldwell were generally considered to be untrue. Of course, if I reminded the old that there was much amazing traffic within the shadows of venerable shrines, there would be the inevitable reply that we find what we seek—which would end the argument without altering the facts. Surely many of the human beings on these benches were cause for worry.

"Say, bud," said a nondescript man in a dirty seersucker suit, "how about a dime for a cup of coffee?"

He would have been decent-looking if he were shaven and clean and adequately nourished. He aroused curiosity as well as pity.

"I'll give you the dime with pleasure but how about your giving me my money's worth by telling me what you're going to do?"

"I be dawg if you ain't one of them wise guys," he chuckled amiably. "Well, I'll tell you the God's truth. Coffee wouldn't set good on my stomach such a warm evenin'. But there's a place around the corner where I can get a nice swig of bay rum what'll go pretty good. Do I get the dime?"

"Of course, you do," I said, handing him his earnings. "I hope you'll always be so honest. But it's a pity you don't treat your stomach to a sandwich or a glass of milk. While you're enjoying your little swig I'll be having another case of the blues because of you and all the rest of what I see on these benches—"

"Don't you worry, kid. I'm o.k. And most of them bums don't give a damn if they ain't. They're a lazy lot. Say, bud, thanks for the—you know—the coffee."

We parted cheerfully. If I had asked for a history of his day I might have heard a long harangue about the Salvation Army who seemed so sympathetic when I went to see what they were like or I might have heard another indictment of the rich; maybe big reforms have little beginnings but it did not take much to make me feel hopeless. I let him go on to his dispenser of bay rum and I went across the street to my unfashionable hotel.

As usual there was some convention of traveling men, hardware dealers or Odd Fellows or barbers, in this town. Tonight the lobby of the hotel was overflowing with loud-mouthed brethren with glittering watch charms and stick pins and faces that beamed with the spirit of cheap professional fellowship: on the mezzanine, at the news-stand, everywhere, they filled the air with malodorous cigar smoke and lusty laughter. But suddenly I spied among the crowd three boys in white linen suits who were leaving their keys at the desk and hurrying to escape the bedlam of the lobby. They were fellows whom I had known at school and one of them I was glad to see. Two were sots, rather likable sots, I suppose, but the third, a medical student at the University of Virginia, was as intelligent as he was attractive. All of them were young and free from melancholy and it occurred to me that their society, if it was offered, would be an excellent remedy for the blues—or would it be just the opposite?

"Where in the hell did you come from?" said the future doctor, a big, healthy, dependable, blonde-haired fellow who thought thoroughly if not brilliantly and was preeminently calm and sane most of the time. "Come along, we're going to see a sweet little girl uptown. I'm trying to hold these roughnecks down."

The other two greeted me well enough. One was just graduating in law and the other was a tobacconist; both,

after a few drinks, were affable indeed. They were great ladies' men but whisky was their principal delight and besetting sin.

"Sure, come along."

So I joined the trio and drove with them to a stately brick house in one of Richmond's newer residential sections where we spent several hours with a Sweet Briar girl who was a favorite at proms. We sat on the side porch in wicker chairs and there was cheerful talk of dances, drinking, happenings, people, and anything except ideas. The girl was pretty: she had a pert round face and fine auburn hair and wide brown eyes. But really I did not think about her much until we had left her; the visit seemed to go by with many passings of cigarettes and a quantity of light, forgettable talk; most of the time I must have been in a fog, although occasionally I tried to participate in the exhibit of wit and wisdom.

Not until we were back at the hotel, however, did I really think about the girl and how fresh and bright she was in her white organdie; it was not until then that I became quite sentimental about her and embodied in her the innocence we would desire in our sisters and wives. All this because of contrast: the boys had two rooms and a bath and tastes were being considerably indulged; exams were over and this was something of a lark and bender. Even my medical friend, who was unusually thoughtful of his good health, was having a few drinks of the corn mixed with ginger ale and ice. The other two drank amazingly, taking half a glass of liquor at a time, taking it straight, too, and forgetting the chaser; both of them came of heavy drinking families and it was safe to say they would soon have the same kind of wrinkled red necks and puffed cheeks which so many of our sots acquired even before they began to visit the prospering urologists.

A Negro bell boy was summoned and shortly thereafter the future lawyer and the tobacconist retired to the other room with one of those itinerant ladies who were so beautiful in plays and novels I read and so cheap-looking in the small chapters of reality I had known. The medical student waxed liberal in speech but he was as unappreciative as I was of the peroxide blonde in pink lace and ruffles. When she came in and asked us whether we were sick or just plain stingy, I hated her flat, vulgar voice and her dumb face caked with powder.

"My name is Lily, boys. But you can call me Mary Pickford for all I care. Don't I look like America's sweetheart?"

Poor girl! Our tobacconist was her chief admirer and he was the kind who was most careful to conceal his shadier activities: because there were times when he liked nothing better than to talk about chivalry in the presence of his daylight associates.

5

THE next day another bus carried me through Charles City County to an old house on the James. There the low-limbed mimosas and towering broadnut trees shaded a lawn that stretched toward the river bank; beyond the grounds of the brick dwelling lay fields of ripening wheat; along the edges of dusty farm roads trumpet vines and Queen Anne's lace grew prolifically among small wild flowers and flourishing weeds. The country of my mother's people was beautiful indeed.

This was one house on the James which rich Northerners had not bought: the family were hanging on to the old place and I suppose it would have taken more than mortgages to bother them. My host was a stout old man with

a florid complexion and sparse white hair; he had a big rumbling voice and a jovial manner. He took me down to the cool cellar under the house and showed me his treasures: long shelves bearing carefully sorted bottles of aged wines and liquors.

"Now look here, Son, this stuff is worth a dollar a drop to anybody who knows good stuff, the genuine article, I mean. You can't buy anything like this now—"

His wife was white-haired and plump like her husband. She was gay when she talked about the good times she used to have when she and my mother were girls but she was sad when she talked of death and poverty. The poverty was difficult to appreciate: we lunched in a dining-room full of mahogany and silver and Negroes brought enough fried chicken, vegetables, corn bread and fresh strawberry ice cream to have fed ten people instead of three.

We talked about the hunting of sora and ducks. We discussed food and drink and recalled an old gentleman of Westover who, when his wife had expressed a wish that every drop of whisky might be priced at a thousand dollars, had said, "Oh, my darling, just think how poor you would be!" We listed the triumphs and disasters of countless cousins, aunts, and uncles. We recalled with gusto a benefit concert that had been given one summer night on a moonlit lawn not far away: a well-known Virginia pianist had come to play and there was a large and enthusiastic audience under the fragrant mimosas. Among the guests of the promoter of the concert there was the granddaughter of a former president of our country; the girl was studying voice with noted teachers and everybody was eager to hear her sing. "I'd love to," she said, "but will *he* play my accompaniments?" It took only a moment to find out—the Virginia pianist flatly refused. The county people were indignant. They could never forgive the

pianist, for the president's granddaughter was one of our loveliest girls. . .

When the dessert was finished we moved to a vine-covered side porch for more talk. Something was said about Negroes which puzzled me. So, when my hostess went into the house for her nap, I said to my family's old friend: "Has there ever been a lynching in this part of the county?"

He chewed meditatively on his long cigar. His voice was lowered when he answered.

"Lawdy mercy, Son, I wonder what made you ask me *that*. I don't remember but *one* in my whole life. But I declare that was a *big to-do* if there ever was one. It was a long while back."

"Please, sir, tell me about it."

"Go long, Son, nobody talks about *that* now."

"If you tell me, I can't promise not to tell, but I won't quote you and, anyway, it happened too long ago for anyone to care."

"I reckon so. Well, it was one spring evening, just about supper-time, when some fellows rode over here and said a white woman up the other end of the county had been bothered by a nigger. I knew the darkey, a big, powerful, yellow buck who worked on a farm up the way. I didn't know the woman. But, anyway, we were all told to meet at twelve o'clock that night. We were making masks to wear and getting our horses ready; so the ladies caught on to something and were curious to know where we were going; but we didn't let on a thing. We rode to the courthouse a little before twelve. There was a big crowd of us, fifty or sixty, I reckon. I was one of the bunch who guarded the sheriff's house to keep the old man from trying to break it up, so I didn't see the actual

hanging. I've always been kind of glad I didn't. But I saw the nigger after it was all over. And that was enough for me."

"What about the woman? Was anything else said about her?"

"That's what made me sick. That was mighty bad, Son, mighty bad. Afterward we found out that she was one of a bad lot of poor whites. She was the worst kind of trash. You know what I mean. She led him on, I mean. We were just a hot-headed crowd of young fools and we didn't stop to think. I don't approve of lynchings, Son, and I'm glad we don't have them in this state like they do down South. By the way, changing the subject, how would you like an ice-cold mint julep — or is it too soon after dinner?"

He called a Negro with the casual air which reminded me of a relative who used to say to me, "Don't bother to cut your own grass, darling, when you can get a darkey for fifteen cents an hour." It was not long before we had chilled glasses of a drink that was not only good to taste but good to look at, with the fresh green leaves and red cherry brightening the sparkling liquid.

"Who'd you see in town?"

"Last night I saw some school friends —"

"And you went courting?"

"Well, maybe you'd call it that. And in the afternoon I went to see Miss Ellen Glasgow and Mr. James Branch Cabell."

"Whose daughter is Ellen Glasgow? Seems to me I've heard of her."

"She's a writer."

"Oh, yes, and so is Annie Cabell's boy. He wrote an awful book once called 'Grandfather's Neck' and said in print what most of us wouldn't dare to whisper. I didn't

read it but my wife told me about it. That was a scandal. But I guess you had to go to see him on some business. Your mother told me you wrote for newspapers."

"Just occasionally, sir."

"And where are you heading from here?"

"I'm going to Virginia Beach."

"Now you're talking up my street! Lawd, Lawd, I wish I could go with you. There's a pretty girl and a drink of liquor down there for every sand on the shore. Why, Son, you'll have the time of your life!"

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V

PRINCESS ANNE

V

PRINCESS ANNE

I

My first hostess at Virginia Beach was a lady whom I shall call Mrs. Bowes. A Richmond friend had spoken a word for me and Mrs. Bowes said she would be pleased to give me board at ten dollars per week if I would assist her with office work and recommend Sea Home to my acquaintances. Among some of the Richmond gentry (who must not have seen her at her worst) this beach proprietress enjoyed fair esteem and I was told that a sojourn at her establishment would be restful and pleasant.

Late one Saturday afternoon a courteous bus driver deposited me at the back gate of Sea Home. Mrs. Bowes was in the yard; she was turning a hose on a bed of spindly cannas which seemed even spindlier when one's gaze wandered to neighboring premises where fragrant petunias and cape jasmines were growing in profusion.

"Yes, indeed, it's real nice to see you," she chirped as she extended a small brownish hand. "Come right on in! You must be awful hot and tired. I'll take you straight upstairs and let you get settled before supper."

She turned off the hose and started toward the steps.

"Just follow me. And mind the fresh paint! Did you *ever* see a place look so sweet and clean? If I do say it myself, Sea Home's way yonder ahead of any cottage on

the beach. Oh, you'll just *love* it here! Everything's so homelike and nice. . . We'll work hard but we'll play some, too. My guests will start coming in next week —"

While we went up three flights of stairs to a tiny room under the eaves I surveyed my hostess in amazement. She did not reach my shoulders in height and she could not have weighed more than ninety pounds but she moved as though she were made of strong wire; she was straight as a rod except in the region just below her backbone where it appeared that two upturned bowls might be concealed beneath her stiff white dress. Her small head was covered by a mop of unruly bobbed hair. She wore large tortoise-shell spectacles over her beady gray eyes which, with her sharp nose and wrinkled brown skin, made her look like some kind of oldish bird. She was the drollest specimen of womanhood imaginable and, since I was as tall and thin as she was short and thin, it occurred to me that we were a very ludicrous pair.

Her voice was variable: one moment she chirped and the next moment she whined.

"See, here's your bureau," she said, fidgeting about my little room under the eaves. "And here's your washstand. The bathroom's just down the hall. I'm staying on this floor, too. So is Ruby June Rose—that's a girl from the country who's helping me—she's dumb as she can be. . . They're painting on the second floor and we'll stay on up here a while. . . Now, tell me, I bet you know lots of my boys. Do you know —"

She called many familiar names and listed an astounding number of drinkers from all parts of the state, sots whom I knew at the University, at V.M.I., in Richmond or Danville. "Isn't he a sight? Isn't he a bird? Isn't he a scream?" she giggled as we discussed some especially eminent young drunks of Virginia.

When she left me at last I looked around the unattractive cell of a room. But what difference could ugly furniture and bare walls make? From the side window there was a glimpse of the ocean: there were whitecaps over the blue water and, casting a delicate afterglow over everything, there was a vanishing June sun in the limitless sky. Optimism was momentarily triumphant: surely the shortcomings of Mrs. Bowes and her Sea Home could be no more than mildly annoying when the world of sea and sky was so beautiful. The salt air made one breathe more easily and the new scene, the breaking of waves upon the shore and the pageant on the boardwalk, suddenly made life seem wonderful and I marveled for a moment that anyone ever thought this planet less than perfect.

Just then Mrs. Bowes called me and I hurried downstairs.

"Come to supper! It's only a teensy bite. Ruby's been too busy cleaning to cook anything. But you just wait till we open up good. We have the finest meals you ever tasted. Last winter I visited hotels all over the country but I never saw the equal to Sea Home."

We sat at one of the round tables in the blue and white dining-room. Ruby June Rose did the serving. She was an enormous girl: her body bulged beneath her green uniform; her large face, with its watery blue eyes and fuzzy pink cheeks, was encircled by coarse yellow hair. Her feet were too small to support her weight; she had cut her shoes in order to release part of their contents but she was still in pain. She resorted to shuffling instead of walking and, even above the loud roar and swishing of the sea, we could hear her movements.

"For mercy sakes, pick up your feet, Ruby!" commanded Mrs. Bowes. "You sound like a cow." Then, when the poor girl disappeared toward the kitchen, her

mistress said to me, "Looks like a cow, too, don't she?" Shaking her bobbed head ruefully, she giggled inanely as she nibbled another piece of the sliced bread which was the mainstay of our cold supper of canned peaches and preserves, the "light lunch" which was the subject of so many apologies on the part of my hostess. At last she jumped up and said, "You'll excuse me, won't you, if I run up to the A. and P. a few minutes?"

As soon as Mrs. Bowes went out of the backyard past her spindly cannas, Ruby returned and addressed me with a husky voice that possessed a lugubrious tone I cannot describe, a sort of half-sob which seemed to say the whole business of living was too much to be borne.

"Don't you want me to run fry you a aig real quick before she gits back? I know you must be hongry. Mrs. Bowes don't know how to feed no menfolks. Anyway, she's too stingy."

This, I thought, must be handled with diplomacy if I was to stay at Sea Home in peace. A man between two women at odds must be prepared for the worst.

"No, thanks, I've had a plenty. Thanks all the same."

"I hope you'll like it here but I know you won't. I wish I was back on the farm. I answered her ad in the paper and come down here with her last week. I swear I been so homesick I thought I'd die. Oh, Mister, she's a mighty small woman but she sure makes up in hatefulness what she ain't got in size. She makes out like she's a Chrischun—claims she's one of them 'pisterpalyuns—but she sure don't act like she's got no religion. She treats me like a dawg. All day long it's 'Do this, Ruby. Run here, Ruby. Pick up your feets, Ruby. Scrub this, Ruby.' Just like I was anybody's old hound dawg. *You'll be sorry you come, too.*"

"Well, I hope not. Tell me, where did you get such a fancy name?"

"Oh, go 'long," she snickered, a coy smile invading her peach-bloom face. "Everybody asks me how come I'm named Ruby June Rose. It's Ruby for a stone, June for a month, and Rose for a flower. Won't that cute of Mama? She got it out of a herb juice almanac. Of course she had the 'Rose' part to start with. Papa was named Buck Rose—"

The sound of Mrs. Bowes pattering on the walk outside made the girl rush back to the kitchen. I got up and went into the so-called lobby, a narrow room with a desk, an upright piano, and wicker chairs and tables. Mrs. Bowes met me there as she came in from the porch.

"I guess you're rested up from your trip, so let's start in on a little business. Look here on the desk—here are some picture postcards of Sea Home and I want you to send them to a long list of the *very nicest* families. . . Have you got a fountain pen? . . . What do you think we ought to say?"

We discussed many ways of singing the praises of Sea Home but decided at length upon one form for all the cards: *Sea Home is spick and span in its fresh coat of paint. Excellent meals and homelike atmosphere. Rest with your friends on our front porch while the salt breezes restore your health. We will welcome you. Our prices are right.*

Mrs. Bowes had a Richmond directory in which she had marked those whom she deemed socially desirable and this list of names was the subject of my first attack.

When I went up to my bed under the eaves late that night my fingers were cramped and my brain was full of addresses of Adamses, Archibalds, Branches, Berkeleys, Bryans, Bryants, and Richmond eligibles through the C's.

Nor until our guests began to arrive did I have the slightest appreciation of Mrs. Bowes as a business woman. People were telling me strange tales about her. They said she would eject the occupant of any room whenever a customer came along who would pay a bigger price. They said she averaged at least one fuss a day, and that she infuriated many persons.

One Saturday night, for instance, she had rented two rooms to six Sweet Briar girls. Sometime before midnight, while the girls were up the beach, a couple appeared and said they would pay a very good price for lodgings for the night; they would be leaving in the morning. Every space in Sea Home was taken, but little Buzzie, as she was known along the beach, could not bear to turn the couple away. . . She would take a chance! She had known some wild girls from Sweet Briar. Was it not likely that these girls would stay out all night and never know the difference if she let the couple stay in one of their rooms? Thus she would be making double profit. . . So all the bags of the Sweet Briar maidens were moved into one of their rooms and the couple took possession of the other. Shortly thereafter the sextet, quite lady-like and sober, came back to get a good night's rest. Mrs. Bowes was terrified. "I never *dreamed* you'd come in," she plead. "It was Saturday night and I—" The girls were furious. "Just *what* do you think we are? And just *why* do you think we rented a room for somebody else to sleep in?" But all six had to go into the remaining room; three girls to a bed did not permit much comfort and morning could not come too soon.

There were many such tales and I did not doubt that most of them were true but I wanted to find out for myself. Your education in Virginia was incomplete unless you

knew some of the more illustrious ladies who kept boarding-houses. In Lexington and Richmond, at the University and at Virginia Beach, at almost every crossroad of the Old Dominion there were ladies who did very well for themselves by taking in "paying guests" — but not one of these ladies could have been more amazing than Mrs. Bowes. Who, besides Mrs. Bowes, had a Dog Palace?

In the backyard of Sea Home there was a cottage walled with beaver-board which could be quickly repaired after fights and brawls. There were cots in every available space: there were accommodations for several dozen gentlemen if they were in no condition to be fastidious. This establishment was known as the Dog Palace. It cost three dollars per night to stay there and to be served three meals a day on the back porch of Sea Home proper when you were not too drunk to eat. If you misbehaved too much your rates were considerably increased.

The Dog Palace was as famous as it was profitable: many a young gentleman had made merry within its flimsy walls. Some of its patrons returned every year. One group from an inland town came for two weeks each Fourth of July and with them they brought a giant keg of mountain corn which was speedily consumed during a continuous open house.

Sea Home proper was different. Its atmosphere was suitable to respectable families, to elderly ladies who had come to the beach for the benefits of salt air and a minimum of conviviality, to vacationers who reveled in expeditions to the ancient lighthouse at Cape Henry or to the fisherman's paradise at Lynnhaven more than they reveled in journeys to a bootlegger's retreat in the pine woods. In Sea Home proper there was relatively little drinking. If you were an important barrister from Richmond or a sportsman from Warrenton or an opulent railroad man

from Roanoke—well, you might have highballs in your room before dinner. But no rough doings, no vulgar, low-brow drunkenness!

“Drunks belong in the Dog Palace,” Mrs. Bowes would say, “and I won’t have them in my nice clean cottage.” When intoxicated guests from her annex came near the front porch she would cry angrily, “Get back, you big old fools, get back to the Dog Palace!”

“Now, now, Mrs. Buzzie, don’t get sho exshited. Be a shweet girl.”

Occasionally the neighbors or more dignified guests complained of Dog Palace happenings. Then Buzzie professed to be gravely shocked and promised to exercise immediate reforms.

One night an especially noisy party was given by some young men who came to the beach for an annual fortnight and were well lit from the moment of their arrival until their departure. Buzzie ran back and forth to the annex in her pink wrapper but she did not succeed in quieting the gathering until just before dawn when the host staggered to the door and swore that his guests were leaving by way of the back window.

At eight o’clock, just before the first call for breakfast, the proprietress went out again to see whether her walls and furniture had been damaged during the night. She poked her little bobbed head in first one door and then another. . . The floors were covered with cigarette stubs, whisky bottles, chewing-gum wrappers, and soiled clothes. Some heavy sleepers on the cots still wore their linens and flannels of the night before; others wore little or nothing.

But Mrs. Bowes did not seem to be disturbed by anything she saw until she reached the tiny back room. There she received her real shock. On one of the cots a rather pretty red-haired girl in a white organdie frock slept blissfully

with her back turned to a young man wearing a wrinkled blue coat and white flannel trousers. . . First the proprietress screamed. Then she shook the sleepers until at last they opened their bloodshot eyes and gazed wearily at the frantic little woman who continued to shout and bawl until she had collected an audience for her scene.

"Shame, shame, shame!" she cried, her childish voice rising higher and higher, arousing youths in shorts and pajama trousers and protective towels. "You loose wicked girl! What would your mother say? Why, I never had such a disgraceful thing to happen at Sea Home in all the years I've been here! Shame, shame, shame. . . Get up, get up, don't you lie there another minute! You've laid down just once too much already, young woman! I'm going to put you off this beach—"

The girl sat up and held her head in her hands; a pathetic excuse of a smile played about her attractive mouth and soft gray eyes. What was this, a nightmare or a swift punishment for taking whisky straight when she was accustomed to milder potions? She turned appealingly to the boy beside her, a good-looking dark youth with a horrible hangover. It took him several moments to collect even a semblance of wits.

"Now, now, Mrs. Bowes," he said suavely, "you must keep your shirt on a minute—"

"Shut your big mouth, you bad boy!"

"Hold on, Mrs. Bowes, you're all wrong about this, I swear you are. I know it looks bad but it's not. We took too many drinks and went to sleep—that's all there is to it. We drank too much and made too much noise. Otherwise it was a nice party. So you must apologize to my little girl friend. You made a mighty bad mistake, you know—"

"Why, you wait till I apologize!" Mrs. Bowes retorted

sharply. Then she turned toward the girl and emitted a melodramatic hiss, "Hussy!"

The suddenly sanctified proprietress was not subdued until the entire population of the Dog Palace threatened to walk out; then she went into Sea Home proper and tried to think. It was hard for her to know which way to turn. She wanted to make money and to do that she had to keep everybody pleased. The Dog Palace was too remunerative to be abolished; yet she could not afford to offend the guests of Sea Home proper. What could she do?

After the turbulent party she decided to placate her patrons in Sea Home proper by improving her meals. So she delegated me to interview the ladies and gentlemen on the subject of Sea Home fare and to make a prompt report to headquarters. I went from one group to another and tried to make my inquiries as tactful as I could. There were various complaints: some did not like so much sea food and others wanted even more crabs and lobsters; some thought the light bread was inferior; some said they did not get enough of anything and were forced to visit the drugstores after meals to satisfy hunger induced by salt air and water.

When I rendered my report I realized immediately that Mrs. Bowes was one of those persons who beg for criticism only to find they cannot stand it. She was crimson with rage. Her little beady eyes flashed and the mop of unruly hair stood on end with each frantic jerk of the small head.

"Who said they didn't get enough to eat? Who said it, I tell you, who said it?"

"I didn't know this was going to be personal, Mrs. Bowes, really I didn't."

"I bet that big fat Mrs. Adams said it and I'll go straight and ask her—"

So she circulated among her patrons, demanding of

them whether they had made any complaints of her fare. "I know good and well I set the best table on this beach," she would begin and most of the guests found it easier to agree with her than to spoil their holidays by engaging in petty rows. Only a few members of the young married set, "the Young Mothers Club" as I had dubbed them, stuck to what they had said. Most people made me the goat and Mrs. Bowes accused me of inventing the complaints.

"You made them up," she said. "You're just trying to make things hard for me."

She made things hard for me in turn. She put me in the smallest and least attractive room of the Dog Palace and told me I would have roommates as soon as she secured more double-decker cots. She felt that beggars could not be choosers and I ought to make the best of my surroundings. But one night I was sick; and after I listened to maudlin quartets of "Sweet Adeline," hour after hour, with only a beaver-board wall between my cot and the circle of whisky basses and tenors, I went so far as to ask permission to sleep in one of the vacant spaces of Sea Home proper. Oh, no, she wouldn't do that but she'd hush the boys. . . She hurried to the Dog Palace and told the drunks that I had complained of their behavior and had announced that I was shocked and indignant. Fortunately the boys were too far gone to comprehend; the next morning they were amiable enough when I explained that I did not care how much they drank but I felt that Mrs. Bowes should separate sleepers from night hawks. They said they agreed with me.

It was no new thing for the beach to give unusual rights to drunks and merrymakers; you could do things along the shore of Princess Anne which would cause you to be arrested in almost any other place in Virginia. That was traditional. As far back as 1854, an eminent Virginia

bishop, after a visit to Princess Anne, wrote sadly and preached sternly about "the cards, the bottle, the horse-race, the continual feasts." Certainly the bottle—if not the rest—was still flourishing. On the beach the influence of liquor was accepted casually; life-guards were accustomed to rescuing drunks from the briny deep and a passed-out form on the sand caused little concern. And in an institution like the Dog Palace a sober man was almost conspicuous.

It was easy for any resident of our part of the beach to forget that there were hundreds of people up and down the shore who were sufficiently possessed of their faculties to see the ships far out against the horizon, to enjoy the bright and fragrant petunias in their yards, and to glory in the strong breath of the endless sea.

3

Now Sea Home was doing a brisk business. The arrival of a guest who murdered the English language and sought to dine in shirt sleeves was observed quietly and with a minimum of show. But the appearance of a guest who was known to social columns of Virginia papers made our small Mrs. Bowes delirious with pride and joy.

"Why, child, they're the *biggest* people in Richmond! Colonial Dames and St. Paul's Church and I don't know what all. Think what it means to me—"

When one of *the* Bryants or *the* Williamses slept under her roof she could ask no more of God. Servants could not move fast enough with ice-water and towels; there could not be too many extra attentions for the blue-blooded elect.

"Thank heavens I've got my good niggers now. I got so tired of that cow in the kitchen—"

Ruby June Rose was gone. She and her mistress had fought constantly and the poor girl became increasingly homesick and forlorn. Then one morning there came a letter to end her woes.

"My hawgs is sick," she said joyfully. "My folks need me. I'm goin' home!"

She had left the next day and a Negro girl had come to take her place. Now all the servants were colored. Celesta, the chief of the domestics, was a grinning, gold-tooth girl whose efficiency was at a premium; she would not be hounded by the small lady of the house.

"Jesus knows Mrs. Bowes is a case in this world," Celesta told me one day when I was writing the eternal postcards while my vigilant superior was at the fish market. "Does you know us niggers even has to watch her like a hawk to keep her from gittin' our tips off the tables? I'm sho skeered I'm gonna kill her befo' this here summer's over."

It was not Celesta, however, who came nearest to committing the murder.

A boat had come ashore up the beach to offer for sale a load of choice liquors at ridiculously low prices. The porters from the cottages returned with wholesale quantities of precious liquids. The gin was especially cheap: on the spur of the moment I bought four sparkling green bottles and hid them in a suitcase under my cot. A few nights later I took out one bottle and presented it as a peace offering to some college friends in the Dog Palace whom Mrs. Bowes had turned against me by telling them I said they were "low-down sots." The bottle did not last long and the boys besought me to tell them where they could buy more of the same stuff. I told them about the ship that came ashore.

"And I bought four bottles. Personally, I prefer Scotch but a friend of mine—"

"You mean to say you've got three bottles now?"

"Yes, I have."

"I'll give you four dollars—no, I'll even give you five dollars a bottle."

They begged, they argued, they nagged. Finally I sold them the three bottles and they departed gaily. Mrs. Bowes heard of the transaction just when she was getting angry because I had been offered a place by the proprietress of Ocean Vista. She would not have minded my leaving by myself but she knew I had a party of friends coming the next week; the party would go wherever I was staying. She could not suppress her indignation.

"Anyway, you're just talking big," she said. "You're not going."

In the Dog Palace cell I packed my belongings. When I went into the lobby Celesta said, "She done talk herse'f down till she's so nervous she had to take a li'l drink. It put her to sleep an' when I went by her door jus' now she was snorin' an' snortin' like a young heifer. Lawd, if that woman ain't a case in this world. She done run her husban' off to Chicago long ago an' it sure is a blessin' her three chillun is off an' married—"

"Wake her, Celesta. I want to leave right away."

A few minutes later Mrs. Bowes appeared from her first-floor room. She wore her pink wrapper; her bobbed head was even more ruffled than usual; her beady eyes were drowsy and blurred.

"How dare you to disturb me! Didn't you know I was sleeping?"

"Of course, I did. Everybody on the beach must have known it. You sounded like a fog horn. . . I've come to pay my bill."

"You can't leave like this. You said you'd stay all summer. I'll go get my lawyer."

"I couldn't write your letters and copy those silly post-cards all day after lying awake all night with drunks in the Dog Palace."

"Well, I never! You're a pretty one to talk about drunks! You're a bootlegger yourself. Don't I know you've been selling gin all up and down the beach? If you ain't a bootlegger I don't know who is!"

"If buying and selling four bottles of gin makes me a bootlegger then I am one. . . But now I'll pay you my ten dollars and I'd like a receipt. Really *you* ought to be paying *me*. I was a fool to slave all day just to get a few dollars off my board."

"Ten dollars! No, sir-ee! I'm charging you three dollars per day, twenty-one dollars per week, because you didn't give me notice. I'll go get my lawyers."

"Go get them. I like lawyers. Half my family connection are lawyers and damned good ones, too. I'd like to tell your lawyers a few facts about their client. If you weren't supposed to be a lady, I'd tell you and it wouldn't—"

"Why—why—you ugly, impertinent old fool! I've never been so insulted! You're no gentleman, you're a big old jackass! That's not half—you're a—"

"You're being childish, Mrs. Bowes, but I suppose you can't help being yourself. . . Please give me the receipt. I'm tired of this bickering. If I stay here much longer I might say something I'd regret."

She went to the desk and scratched over a piece of paper. She gave the receipt to me and I gave her what I owed her.

"I'll be at Ocean Vista, Mrs. Bowes, if you'll be kind enough to forward any mail or messages."

"Why, I'm sure I couldn't be bothered. I'd be shamed to know anybody who stayed at Ocean Vista. It's the

worst cottage on the beach. Mrs. Lomax drinks like a fish. She—”

I grabbed my baggage and went out of the front door.

“I’m glad you’re gone!” shrieked the voice from behind the screening. “I can get plenty of *nice* boys to help me, plenty of *nice, clean gentlemen!*”

Before her season was over there were to be five nice, clean gentlemen who would find Sea Home more than they could bear. One of the five came from a distant Southern state and it seemed a pity that his first impressions of the ladies of our Mother of States should have been so dark and dismal.

I saw him just after he had severed relations with the diminutive proprietress.

“I hope I never work for a woman again,” he said bitterly. “No man would ever be so hard on another man.”

“Don’t judge women by Mrs. Bowes,” I said. “She has a streak we don’t find in so many Southern women, thank God! Yet, I must admit she’s made me wonder. She made life hot for you and me, for Ruby, for the Negroes when she got a chance. She’s got money and money is power. Have we got many like her?”

“Hell, no, I guess there’s nobody like her in existence. When I tell about her at home nobody’ll believe me. Everybody is supposed to be so gentle in Virginia. After Texas, we don’t bank on any states besides South Carolina and dear old Virginia.”

“And Buzzie is the Virginia lady. . . Well, remember she has her gentle moments but she keeps them for her distinguished guests. You ought to see the rapture on her little puss when she faces an F.F.V. She only relaxes around her menials.”

Fusses with her personnel were part of Mrs. Bowes’s excitement in living and they must not have caused her

much regret. As long as she had remunerative drunks in the Dog Palace and ostensible aristocrats in the spick and span rooms of Sea Home proper she was happily on top of her own little private world.

4

OCEAN VISTA was a short distance down the boardwalk. It was an old, rambling, white structure with porches around its three stories and bath-houses in the large back-yard. The interior was hideous: the lobby was furnished with ornate chairs and settees, a new slot machine, a radio, a tin-pan piano, and gaudy wall pockets full of artificial posies. The dining-room looked like a restaurant in a small-town Southern railway station. The bedrooms had beds and bureaus and that was as much as you could say.

But it suited an enormous, flaxen-haired lady who rented it for two thousand dollars a season.

Even after we became good friends Mrs. Lomax never told me precisely how much she weighed but I knew the figure was on the heavier side of two hundred. She was phenomenally fat; her round face, with its luminous brown eyes and cheerful smile, would have been quite pretty if it had not rested upon cushions of flesh. But her shape! And the poor little feet and hands so disproportionately small for the rest of the great bulk, the pinched feet so unequal to the heavy burden they were destined to bear through life!

As she told me the first day of our acquaintance, fat was the least of cares to Mrs. Lomax. Twice a day she put on her red bathing suit and went down to the surf. Other bathers would turn sideways as the waves broke but Mrs. Lomax's stomach received the blow of a ferocious white-cap as though it were the caress of a gentle spray. The

crowds on the shore shrieked with mirth but Mrs. Lomax enjoyed her bath in spite of them. She did what she chose. In the evening she wore her pearl ear-rings and dressed in sleeveless and flowery frocks which made her more comfortable even if they exhibited the immense rounds of fat between her elbows and her shoulders.

The first day I was an ordinary paying guest at Ocean Vista but the next morning Mrs. Lomax received me in her second-floor boudoir to make arrangements for a longer stay. She was still in bed : all you could see was her flaxen head and it was hard to believe the great body under the sheet was all one woman. Lingerie lay over the chairs and table ; the odor of whisky came from empty glasses on a tray.

"Oh, honey, I've got the worst head. I don't think I can get up till lunch. Did you have plenty of breakfast?"

"Too much," I said. There had been cantaloupe, fried apples and bacon, eggs, fish, biscuit, wheat cakes and syrup, coffee, and fresh sweet milk—I wished I could send the left-overs to Negroes on Poor House Hill in Danville, Negroes who lived on fried cabbage and black coffee. . .

"You know, I think I'm going to love having you with me. If you'll just write my letters for me, you can stay for six dollars a week. Is that too much? Just a few letters a day, answering questions about rates. I got one of the girls from home to do it but she has too many all-night dates to hold a pen in the morning. And I'd rather die than write a letter myself. . . Tell me, honey, how did you stand a single day at Sea Home? *Home!* The kind of home you want to forget. . . Isn't that little sister a hell cat?"

From that hour Mrs. Lomax and I were friends. Sometimes I was exasperated with her but she was a person you could not possibly dislike. She was lazy, untidy, and woe-

fully Southern in the unpleasant sense of our much abused word—I could not conceive of a New England or Western landlady lying in bed until noon but perhaps I was wrong in believing we had more than our share of indolence, indolence which was appreciably increased under the influence of salt air and the hot summer sun.

Mrs. Lomax was inherently devoid of any sense of serious responsibility but her generous, amiable nature blinded one to her most glaring weaknesses. This was not her first summer as a beach proprietress nor was this the first time she had borrowed money to add debts to debts. How she could hope to profit was more than anyone could imagine. Several rooms were occupied by non-paying sons, daughters, nieces, nephews, and cousins who ate largely and contributed few, if any, services. She did not bother to lock her purse and was the victim of countless petty robberies. Young people talked her into reducing their rates to absurd figures. She gave her guests twice too much at every meal. She thought nothing of putting fifty nickels a day in the slot machine, remembering the time she won a jack pot and forgetting all the times she lost. She gave frequent parties and bought drinks for everyone who joined her motley gatherings. Worst of all, sometimes in the dark hours before dawning, when all her companions had deserted her, she would wake some guest and say, "Go on back to sleep, darling, I just wanted to tell you what a lovely party we had. But, oh me, oh my, was Mrs. Lomax very tight! Just was Mrs. Lomax feeling very high!"

She was incorrigible. If you talked to her in the morning she had a pitiable hangover and, anyway, arguments with her were utterly futile.

"I can't help it if I *don't* make money," she would say. "Please don't fuss. I feel too bad already. Listen to me, precious, I've got passes to the movies and I want you to

take them and get a nice date. You're always so sweet to me."

There was no sense in doing Mrs. Lomax's worrying for her. After I wrote her letters and helped her with her books—ah, what a bookkeeping system!—I sought the pleasures of the beach. Certainly there was no greater feeling of well-being than after you covered your body with olive oil and lay on the warm sand until you were hot; then there was ineffable delight in running toward the breakers and diving under the salty waves.

Now I had discovered a new interest. Some of the native boys were teaching me to fish and beginner's luck was doing wonders. In a canoe we paddled far beyond the whitecaps and dropped our lines in blue water that was as still as a mountain lake. Croakers bit the pieces of shrimp monotonously fast. Baby sharks played about the canoe and sometimes they swallowed hook and sinker and chewed off the line.

Once, while the old hands were pulling in their croakers, miracles began to happen for me: one after the other I pulled in five sea trout which were variously colored like rainbows and were as radiant as jewels. I had never seen anything more beautiful and I was properly proud of my catch. But, much to the amusement of my companions, I thought the fish prettier in the calm water and did not fully appreciate them strung on a line as evidence of victory. They said I could never be a real fisherman. It was a good thing they could not talk to my father. I had sent that sportsman a glowing account of his son's triumph as an angler: here was an item which a father could retail on the golf links or across the desk of commerce.

5

PEOPLE who were quite sane and even conventional at home acted most unexpectedly when they breathed salt air and sensed the gala spirit of Virginia Beach by night. What the hell! many persons seemed to say with one frivolous breath. . .

A fairly attractive teacher from a strict and fashionable Richmond school for girls dressed gaily one breezy evening and sometime after dusk she sauntered up the boardwalk toward Cavalier Shores where the spicy bayberry grew over mounds of sparkling sand. She forgot her winter-time dignity and she forgot that she was almost thirty. Airily she cut her eyes to the right and to the left. She gazed upon the unattached men in white linens or blue flannels whom she passed along the way. She was discriminating; she scorned several males who sought to join her for a stroll but when a well-groomed and prosperous-looking brunette in a blue sport jacket and perfectly creased white flannels smiled at her she smiled in return. Later, when she told me the story, it seemed rather sad. The man was a New York banker who was vacationing alone and was glad to take a pretty Virginia girl to the Beach Club dances and for drives in his fine new Packard; he was not averse to casual and innocuous love-making when the moon rose over the ocean and the night air of Princess Anne was cool and sweet.

Fortunately, the teacher was a good beach girl; she knew beach love was to be regarded lightly and she was not surprised that the banker had a wife and child in New York.

"Wouldn't the Faculty like to hear about this interlude?" she said, laughing gaily as she recalled her brief moment. "I can't believe I ever did such a thing. But I

have no regrets. Nobody knows how tired I was of spending my evenings alone or listening to old ladies. It was a terrible thing to do and I reckon it's mighty lucky I picked on a nice man. You can't always judge by clothes and looks. I might have smiled at a gangster or a criminal —"

Flirtations flourished. Vain boys counted their conquests and swapped histories. One of the more dashing heart-breakers was the life-guard at a large hotel not far from Ocean Vista, a blonde fellow with long-lashed blue eyes, curly hair, and a well-built and carefully tanned physique which was scantily adorned by short white trunks. He viewed the girls with pleasure as he sat on top of his stand with his buoys and ropes. To every pretty newcomer he smiled charmingly, displaying perfect white teeth. He spoke with the deep, smooth drawl of the Southern he-man out to kill.

Occasionally his charms were spurned and then he sulked and fretted like a little boy.

One morning a girl arrived on the bus from Norfolk and walked imperiously into the lobby of Ocean Vista, followed by two porters carrying half a dozen bags. She reminded me of Miss Ginger Rogers of the cinema except that she seemed to me somewhat fairer than that engaging star of Hollywood. And, if she had been a movie queen in the flesh, she could not have caused a more instantaneous sensation.

"Dorothea!" cried Mrs. Lomax joyously, raising her heavy body from a chair by the desk. "Think of having *you* here! Why, precious, I haven't seen you since that hotel convention and you —"

A large ocean-front room on the second floor was opened and with much commotion of maids and porters Dorothea was suitably installed. With a kinsman who owned a big

hotel and a rich young husband she could pay for the best but Mrs. Lomax, characteristically, was awed by a reflection of her ideal of feminine charm and was thoughtless of the girl's pocketbook.

After all, the two spoke the same language.

"Now, precious, you just call for anything you want —"

"Thank you, my dear, I'm sure I shall be quite comfortable."

When the girl appeared on the beach an hour later, dazzlingly attired in a brief suit of white rubber supported by a flowery bow at the back of her comely neck, men of all ages looked at her with admiring eyes. The great-chested life-guard supplied her with umbrella, beach robe, sun glasses, and the company of his irresistible person. Soon he was boasting that he had been promised a date for the evening. But he did not know the Dorotheas of this world.

By six o'clock that afternoon the fair young matron had annexed five lads from the ancient and venerable Hampden-Sidney College, five smooth-faced youths who won her by their "wonderful families" and their boyish idolatry.

"I'm so *terribly* sorry," she explained to the life-guard, "but I've just *got* to break our date. I'm simply *sick* about it but these are five boys who are old friends of my family and they're so *lonesome* I'll *have* to cheer them up —"

"Old friends of your family! Old friends since you picked them up this morning! You make me laugh!"

The bronzed giant in white trunks walked off in a rage.

From that moment Dorothea was the favorite subject of the most indefatigable gossipers of both sexes. The old ladies on the downstairs porches forgot their arthritis and high blood pressure while they whispered and glared and sighed. Sad young girls with bad complexions and romantic longings affected superior sneers. Spurned bachelors

condemned the levity of youth and lapsed into meaningful silence.

Dorothea went through the lobby without seeing or hearing. Upstairs, behind the closed door of her bedroom, she entertained. Usually she had four or five callers at the time but occasionally she would call one boy alone to hook her frocks or pull down her windows or treat her sunburn. And not one person managed to go to her room without being watched by at least one old lady peeping through a cracked door along the hall.

What was the secret life? What were the evil ways which disturbed the destroyers of reputations on the downstairs porches? Could it be true that Dorothea never took a drink, that she discountenanced any unseemly behavior?

"It's all right for you boys to play poker up here with me," she would say. "I'm just a settled married woman."
"You should hear the old ladies—"

"But I don't want to hear them, my dear. I never could get along with them. Ugly, bad old women. At home they tell tales about me. They never seem to like me."

It did not take much to make Dorothea indulge in spells of self-pity so it is a good thing she did not hear the gossip. She had many troubles already; her chief trouble, as she avowed unblushingly, was a rich husband whom she was thinking of divorcing, not just because he was lazy and intemperate, but because she was tired of "marriage in general" and liked men in jovial crowds more than she liked any one man alone. Her husband was called Honey Pie. One night he called her over long distance and affected her tender feelings by begging her to come home. After a lengthy conversation via the public phone she knocked at my door and called for me. It was about eleven o'clock and I was undressing to go to bed.

"It's Dorothea, dear. I need you. Please come to my room. Honey Pie called and I'm all upset."

The girl tried to make you feel that you were the only friend she had in the world and, then, there was no denying that she was lovely to behold. Obedient to the call, I went to her room. She was a flowery vision of lace and silk; her soft brow was puckered beneath clusters of yellow curls; her wide eyes, blurred by real tears, were ineffably appealing if you did not stop long enough to analyze the character behind them.

"Sit there," she said, beckoning to the end of her bed. "Oh, love, I'm *so* sick and nervous. Honey Pie was horrid, perfectly horrid. He said he was going to stay plastered till I come home and he said if I don't come soon he'll kill himself and make an awful scandal in the papers. Oh, what can I do?"

"How can I say? I don't know Honey Pie at all and I don't think I've known you long enough to decide your most intimate affairs for you. But I believe the best thing you can do now is to go to bed."

"Hush that fussing, you big gruff boogie bear! Be a nice boy and rub Dorothea's poor tired back so she won't be so nervous—"

"To hell with Dorothea's poor tired back. I'm going to bed."

"Oh, everybody is so mean to me! Everybody is so perfectly mean and horrid!"

She began to laugh and then she began to cry. Soon she was having a fine case of hysterics. Guests opened their doors to listen; Mrs. Lomax, who was in especially high spirits, staggered her burdensome weight up the stairs and awoke the few who were still managing to sleep.

The episode caused more talk. . . . Poor young matron!

Every time she fluttered her eyes there seemed to be a scandal.

One Sunday evening she came down to dinner looking very fresh and girlish in a bright figured chiffon. When she entered the dining-room every other girl at Ocean Vista seemed to vanish into obscurity. Dorothea may have been a goose but she was an exceptionally pretty goose whom men invariably viewed without any remarkable show of judgment.

She came over to the table where I was sitting with several boys.

"Who wants to go somewhere with me tonight?"

Everybody looked willing but a stocky little swain spoke first.

"Anywhere you say," he said with the blustering way of small men.

"You're not knee-high to a grasshopper," Dorothea replied. "Wouldn't you and I look cute together?"

After a moment she turned to me critically. I knew she wanted to be sure I was properly dressed for a summer evening before she chose me because I was the tallest of the possible escorts.

"Will you go?" she said. "We'll be back by ten-thirty."

"Well, I don't know. What's it all about?"

"Oh, go on with her," urged my companions. "You ought to feel honored."

"Honored! If her five darlings from Hampden-Sidney came along she'd turn me down in a minute. But I can't help wondering what she's planning."

After dinner Dorothea went to her room and put on a black hat with a fringe of black lace which fell over her soft brow, adding mystery to loveliness. But the real

shock was the lorgnette which she clasped in her slender white hand. . . Where were we going?

Not a soul at Ocean Vista, except the few boys who realized the extent of her innocence, would have believed I was to escort Dorothea to the Cavalier Hotel where we were to hear a concert of classical gems. But there she was in the magnificent lobby, settling herself in a comfortable chair and viewing the musicians with her lorgnette.

"Isn't it elegant, my dear? This gorgeous place, this divine music, these *truly distinguished* people. If Honey Pie was any man at all I'd be right here instead of at that cheap joint full of slot machines and horrid old ladies."

So the evening passed. When the concert was over we went straight back to Ocean Vista. Dorothea would not even stop at the drugstore.

"I want to go to sleep thinking about that elegant place," she said.

Mrs. Lomax called me aside in the lobby. She was stimulated by her favorite Tom Collins and she was tittering with news she had gathered from her guests.

"Now, you mustn't be angry, son, but I thought I ought to tell you the way people keep talking. It's about Dorothea. I'm crazy about her myself but they keep on saying she's an awful influence for you boys. They make me sick. . . Tell Mrs. Lomax where you went. I won't tell a soul. I swear on my word of honor I won't."

But the gossipers never got any real satisfaction until the afternoon when Dorothea departed for a Northern trip during which she was to meditate further on the subject of her return to Honey Pie.

She came down to the lobby followed by the tip-seeking Negro boys with her impressive quantity of luggage. She beamed at one young man endearingly and, much to his

surprise, caught his hand as he walked with her to the bus. All her critics were watching and she was acutely conscious of their stares.

"They're mean old busybodies," she said. "But, after all their effort, we must give them one little cheap thrill, mustn't we, love?"

So, just as the big bus drove up the road, Dorothea threw her slender arms about the young man's neck and awarded him a lingering kiss.

"I ought to be ashamed," she said. "But I couldn't resist it."

Thus departed Dorothea.

6

WE talked incessantly. Few remarks might have been worth uttering but words flowed on in boundless torrents. This was our favorite resort and everyone was supposed to be amiable and gay. What did we discuss? Did we discuss ideas and social problems? Did we worry about the mills of Danville, did we bewail the growing democracy of the Richmond Country Club, did we ponder the state of illiteracy in the Old Dominion, did we speak of the decline of Confederate feeling? Did we commend Mr. Rockefeller's work at Williamsburg, did we praise the liberalism of young editors, Dabney of Richmond and Jaffé of Norfolk? Did we mention Virginia's literature or Dr. Freeman's long and reverent study of our Lee?

No, if we touched upon ideas at all, we touched lightly and briefly. Most of the time we talked about personalities of the immediate scene. And usually there was one figure to hold the center of the stage without being at all aware of the dubious honor. In our own small world, the neighboring hotels and the stretch of beach in front of Ocean

Vista, pretty girls were a popular subject of conversation. Women criticized them; young men praised them; old men eyed them with pleasure and regret. . .

After Dorothea left, there was Jane. Jane was a Yankee. She was the wife of a young Virginian, a dark and arrogant swimmer who exhibited his impressive muscles and conserved his monosyllabic vocabulary in front of the life-guard stand of a prominent hotel. Jane swam even better than Dick. She was training for the Olympics: her crawl was gaining in speed every day and her overhand back-stroke, which had won meets from Florida to Maine, was steadily improving.

It was acknowledged by Virginia Beach judges of feminine form that Jane possessed the one body beautiful of all the bodies beautiful in our midst. The tiny bits of bright-colored bathing attire which she changed several times a day hid little of her shapely self and thereby pleased those who came (with equal pleasure, no doubt) to praise or blame. Some connoisseurs thought her face beautiful; she had clear brown eyes and sensuous lips (which she covered with protective camphor instead of more decorative rouge) but I could not see that her countenance was notably alluring. After being in the sun all year she was the color of a mulatto and her hair had been noticeably affected by constant exposure. Nevertheless, she was admired by males from one end of the boardwalk to the other, even though Dick of the muscles seemed to be a beach husband who retained his wife's affections beyond dispute.

It was pleasant to go swimming with Dick and Jane and I ventured toward their part of the beach almost every morning. When they formed a class in calisthenics, composed chiefly of penitent drunks and fat ladies and gentlemen who were trying desperately to learn to reach over their stomachs and touch their toes, I was a faithful pupil,

much to the pleasure of large crowds on the boardwalk who were convulsed to see a tall, thin youth performing awkwardly among the overweight sots and matrons.

One day, when we had recuperated from one of these strenuous work-outs, Jane said to me, "Let's go out past those whitecaps out yonder while Dick teaches his old dames to fight water. Who knows, maybe we can catch a porpoise?" So we swam out several hundred yards. Jane's easy-going crawl never tired her and I had exhausted a feeble overhand, a side stroke, a breast stroke, a back stroke before it ever occurred to her that I might be fading out of the picture. We had swum until the hotels and cottages on the shore were appearing as small as though they were viewed from a plane high in the air. I gave out entirely and Jane had to tow me in. When we got ashore at last Dick had gone into the hotel and we lay down on the warm sand to rest.

"Damned if that wasn't fun!" Jane laughed. "How I like to beat boys! I got a kick out of bringing you in like a corpse. I wish Dick would poop out sometime. But he's so goddam strong."

"You like Dick a lot, don't you?"

"Yes. . . You must never let him know I've so much as called his name. He's terribly jealous. . . I wish I wasn't so crazy about him. He treats me like a child. Of course I can't smoke or drink or stay up at night—that's because of training and I don't mind. But other things are so unreasonable. As Dick says, I'm a Yankee. So I don't suppose I could ever understand you Virginians. Whenever Dick gets mad at me he begins to tell me how his grandfather fought in the Civil War and what the Yankees did to the old man—anybody would think I had started the war and I don't even know what it was all about. Something about Negroes, that's as much as I know. And I guess

that *could* start a war. Not long after I married Dick at Miami Beach I hired a Negro washer-woman. I spoke of her to Dick as 'a Negro lady' — just thoughtless, you know — and he was so mad he wouldn't speak to me for two whole days. He said, 'I don't care if you do come from Massachusetts. You ought to know better than to call a nigger woman *a lady*.' But there's no use complaining. I'm such a fool about him."

What Jane wanted was a confidant. Dick censored all her letters to her mother in Massachusetts so she was deprived of guidance from home; she disliked the girls she knew along the beach, insisting that they were sugar to your face and acid to your back. So she was glad to find any boy who would listen to her woes while her lord and master was around the corner. . .

It seemed strange that an athletic girl with marvelous health should have been influenced so greatly by the movies. But Jane was a fervent worshiper of the Hollywood ideal. She was not satisfied with being a back-stroke champion. She wanted to be sophisticated like Misses Crawford and Bennett. Like glamorous Joan, like scintillating Connie, she wanted to be "smart" and "cultured" and "soulful." In one of the movie magazines which she devoured she had learned that "poetry and—you know—stuff like that" was the very breath of life to the greater ladies of the cinema. This gave her the idea of improving her mind when she was not improving her back-stroke.

One morning she took me by surprise.

"Would you like some lessons in the Australian crawl?"

"Certainly. How can I get them?"

"If you'll help me with—you know what I mean—culture and pomes—then I'll teach you the crawl—"

And so our pathetic comedy began. While Dick was engaged with his swimming pupils or rescuing inebriate

daredevils from the surf we stretched out on the hot sand and struggled with books. Poor defenseless Poetry! Jane had heard that a glamorous movie star read Millay and it happened that I had a copy of *Fatal Interview*. So, before I received my lesson in the crawl, we read aloud and sought to understand those sonnets, an act of sacrilege beyond belief. No English professor dissecting literature ever abused writing more mercilessly.

"Say 'po-em,' Jane, don't say 'pome' —"

Jane knitted her brow and tried to understand.

Now by this moon, before this moon shall wane
I shall be dead or I shall be with you!
No moral concept can outweigh the pain
Past rack and wheel . . . *

"Do you know what a 'concept' is, Jane? Well, that just means that —"

Jane studied and puzzled and tried to combat the insuperable objects to her progress.

"Do you think I'm just plain dumb? Do you think these baby-talking Southern girls could understand this book?"

7

ONE of the worst storms in the history of the Atlantic Coast began one cloudy morning with a gale which blew umbrellas away, upset chairs, and uprooted the life-guard stands which had been firmly placed against the stone wall along the shore. The whitecaps broke higher and higher and the water churned and foamed as it covered the last vestige of sand. Logs, kegs, bottles, and many kinds of

* *Fatal Interview* by Edna St. Vincent Millay, published by Harper & Brothers, New York.

débris floated in with the leaping waves. The heart of the tempest seemed to be far out in the deep.

There was excitement at Ocean Vista as there was at every other cottage and hotel. When the gale first began some frightened guests had caught early buses and hastened to the safety of their inland homes but those who had not left by lunch were marooned and had to take their chances at the will of God. Electric lines were down. Communication and transportation stopped when the water rushed over the boardwalk and rose through the yards toward the shelters of many terrified human beings.

When her guests began to show their alarm by exhibits of hysteria Mrs. Lomax resorted to larger and larger measures of corn until she staggered to her bed at last. She did not even take off her sleeveless dinner dress of pink *crêpe de Chine*; she lay like a pink mountain and enjoyed the deep sleep of drunkenness which, when it was painfully accomplished after much spinning of the head, no hurricane could disturb.

From the windows we could see porch furniture being whirled through the air. The wind shrieked madly and the pounding of the waves increased every minute. Ocean Vista rocked and creaked. . . Surely we would be washed away.

Only one person—besides our sleeping proprietress—was really placid. That person was a retired naval officer who went to his room and slumbered peacefully until some ladies knocked on his door to ask him how soon they would be meeting a watery death. Clad in pajamas and robe, he came out into the hall and avowed his disgust.

“Go to bed, you ladies,” he commanded as though he were addressing a deck full of ordinary seamen. . . His blue eyes glared from his weather-beaten face.

"You can't stop a storm by sniffing."

With that he banged his door and returned to his bed.

The cases of hysteria multiplied rapidly. Women fainted and there were frantic calls for brandy and ammonia. Little children clung to their parents in terror and the parents prayed aloud for the mercy of God.

Sometime after midnight I went up to the candle-lit room on the second floor where a number of guests were huddled together in their grim watch for the Black Reaper. At first I thought my eyes deceived me. . .

A plump woman from Southwest Virginia clasped her frail husband with protective arms while he moaned and sobbed.

"Hush now, Hubert. It's gonna be all right. Jesus is gonna keep us. Hush, sugar, hush."

But her flat, drawling voice could not pacify her quaking spouse.

"I know we're all gonna be drowneded," Hubert wailed. "This is the first time I ever come to the ocean and, if God spares me this time, I'm not never comin' no more. I told you we ought to go to Buffalo Springs with Annie May and Sam and you kep' on sayin' we had to come to Firginyuh Beach. Oh, Jesus, oh, Jesus—"

I went downstairs to join the boys in the lobby who were helping the servants mop water as it crept under the doors. While we worked we talked feverishly, trying to forget the violent noises of the elements and the rocking of Ocean Vista's walls.

"If this tornado whiffs anybody away," I said, "I hope it will pick on little Buzzie Bowes and her Dog Palace."

"Yassuh, but you go on tawkin' like that," stammered one of the Negroes, "this here storm is gonna git wuss an' wuss."

But not long after dawn the tempest began to abate.

The howling of the wind ceased and the sky lightened so we could see the desolation outside. About eight o'clock it was safe to go out to view the damage. A few cottages had been partly smashed, porches had been destroyed, the rails of the boardwalk were bent, our canoes had been ruined, automobiles that had been left outside were sunk in sand. Sea Home was intact. . .

People wanted to wire their friends and families that they were still alive but lines were not yet restored. Nearby Norfolk was flooded and we heard that it looked like Venice with small boats in streets submerged in water.

Back in Ocean Vista, the sea captain got up and was dismayed that no breakfast had been prepared in the kitchen. Mrs. Lomax arose with a hangover and said, "Now I *know* I'll go broke. Everybody'll be afraid of the beach the rest of the summer. Oh, my head! Let me go get a pick-up."

"It might help if you'd stay sober, Mrs. Lomax. We are a great people for drinking. Most of us seem to try it but don't you think drinking, even if it does postpone troubles, only makes them all the worse when you do face them. That sounds preachy but I was just thinking that, if you'd stay sober, we might all get together and try to round up some business."

"Oh, please don't fuss with me. If you only knew how nervous I am!"

She took a drink to start the day and then she struggled into the lobby to see if the slot machine was still standing.

She was right about going broke. Although the weather after the storm was glorious and the ocean was like a mill pond for days, the crowds turned homeward. While five or six of us roamed about the empty halls of Ocean Vista Mrs. Lomax drowned her sorrows after her own established fashion.

VI
PITTSYLVANIA AGAIN

VI

PITTSYLVANIA AGAIN

I

SEPTEMBER was an unusually hot, dry month in Danville. Parts of the garden were parched and brown; phlox and zinnias mildewed when they were watered and, as far as a lawn was concerned, it was just as well to let wild grass go its own determined way. The sun beat down mercilessly over unshaded plates between the oaks and elms. The weather did not become bearable until the time when leaves were turning, the time when scuppernongs were ripening for people who were lucky enough to own an arbor.

Nobody said, "Now what are you going to do?" But I needed no one to tell me that a young man past twenty-one could not lie around the house of his parents indefinitely, depression or no depression. Of course there were plenty of idlers: at the drug store corners there were grown boys leaning against the show windows while they smoked cigarettes they bummed from "the old man" and talked about liquor they would buy with "the old man's dough." Such youths were not generally admired, however, and it was agreed that every young man should have some kind of a remunerative job.

But jobs in Danville were not easy to find. Tobacco companies were not even hiring sons and nephews when

they could evade the duty, and little stores on Main Street could hardly keep the clerks they had. The habit of sitting down on the government which was to be so popular later on in the winter had not become prevalent. There were not many opportunities for earning an honest dollar that autumn. From Gloucester I ordered a large shipment of narcissi bulbs which I sold to the garden-crazy ladies of town; with the proceeds I paid a few bills and was broke again. Now what? "Why not write some more articles?" asked people who did not realize that the necessity of making money does not always help one to write and, besides, magazines at that time were cutting down space and it was not easy for young unknowns to sell their stuff.

There was one business in town where employment was spreading: the cotton mills. The NRA and the forty-hour week had made more jobs for textile hands at the gigantic brick plants on the Dan and, after I heard of many people who were joining the workers, a desire to go to the employment office was too strong to be curbed.

First, though, I went straight to the president. Robert West was an able and personable successor to Harry Fitzgerald. He was young and friendly; he was athletic-looking with a big, square boyish face and shoulders which could have pushed a heavy load of cloth if any unthinkable revolution should have caused him to give up his executive desk to swap tweeds for overalls. His Northern origin and Harvard background were not too greatly against him; he sang lustily with the First Baptist choir on Sunday and overcame inherited drawbacks by a firm handshake and an amiable spirit.

Afterward I felt that I was hypocritical in telling the mill chief that I could be seriously interested in a job in his mills and that I wished to work my way from a laborer's place to the eminence of a salaried magnate. That was a

half-lie common to all job-seekers. If you had said you were just looking for a stop-gap until you could do better you would have received small consideration. For example, in the sanctimonious offices of the superintendent of schools, Mr. G. L. H. Johnson of William and Mary said to every prospective enlightener of America's young, "Are you *permanently* interested in teaching as a profession?" Surely that solemn dignitary must have known that his young ladies from Farmville would quit teaching as soon as they could find a husband, just as the sad-eyed male pedagogs would become administrators like himself, if given half a chance. Even in Danville, where we boasted of a church for every factory and a preacher for every mill, we knew that every man was looking out for himself seven days of the week, which was natural enough. Mr. West would not expect me to remain forever in Mill No. 5 merely because I said I had no prospects and few hopes at the time and would welcome any small chance to participate in the romantic industry of cotton. Mr. West was nobody to be fooled: he had a keen gaze and unimpaired hearing and unlike some of his less helpful cohorts he did not deem it wise to fear my motives.

He said the word for me and I got a job in the finishing room. I had no trouble in passing the brief examination of the little mill doctor who saw that I was neither ruptured nor syphilitic and waved me on with a lot of poor fellows who had muscles I lacked but appeared to have pellagra and the listless look of so many of their kind. It was our family doctor who protested. My own doctor whom I liked as well as any man on Main Street was a fine doctor but he had inherited money and did not have to work too hard; he was off at White Sulphur now playing golf, so I could not ask his advice. So I saw the family doctor, Dr. Willie, as we called him affectionately. He was a

physician of the old school ; he had nursed me through two illnesses, bringing samples of medicines in his coat pocket to save me costly drug bills and doing innumerable kind things which were characteristic of a doctor who thought of his patients first and money last. Mill work might be very well for mill people, he said, but it would never do for me ; it would put me straight in Green Hill. But in spite of every warning and protest I was determined to try.

So I went to work as an apprentice in the finishing room. I was to begin with wages of \$7.20 a week which seemed slightly small when I remembered that I had earned as much as \$50 a week by reporting this same company's strike of a few seasons before. Dressed in the regulation white clothes of laborers in the finishing department, I arrived at ten minutes past six and was ready to start when the whistles blew twenty minutes later. The vast room held 500 of the more than 6000 employees but their voices were drowned as soon as the machines began their steady, deafening noise. As first it seemed to me that my eardrums would be bursting from the thunderous sound ; I did not realize that textile hands become accustomed to noises and odors and dust and accept such minor annoyances as part of the inevitable day. Even conversation did not have to be suspended : you merely bawled above the sound of the power motors and the buzzing of the mangles. And, if you became faint for lack of air, you could crack a window for a moment until somebody gave you a murderous look.

The cheery-face young boss man, product of a textile school in Raleigh, set me to tearing sheets. Up and down a measuring-table I walked, back and forth, back and forth, cutting and folding and stacking. After an hour of this I was frantic. I looked at some of the apathetic men and women around me and shuddered to think that some of

them had been tearing sheets nearly all their lives. They moved like automatons from one end of a table to another and I figured that some of them could have reached California easily with the miles they had covered in tearing sheets for somebody's bed of rest. It made me sick; it gave me the same feeling of sentimentality or whatever one might choose to call it which depressed me at times in the presence of servants. Sometimes I used to wonder why our cook should scrub my floor any more than I should be scrubbing hers and I was pleased when Mother told me she never asked our servants to do anything which she would be above doing herself. Similarly I wondered childishly and with a childish but very real terror why the world decreed that these sheet-tearers should have such a monotonous and difficult lot in life while some men who did not seem to me to contribute much to society had soft chairs in the big offices. Muddled reasoning was inevitable in these surroundings.

The first day the overseer gave me one of the supposedly responsible jobs which, in truth, could have been done by anybody with a fairly healthy body and a minimum of brains. I was to order rolls of cloth from the bleachery four floors below: the cloth was to be yarded by groups of men at machines, torn into pillow case sizes by the tearer-girls, trucked to the straighteners, then carried in case lots to the girls who labeled, seamed, hemmed, and inspected the final product upon which American citizenry were to lay their drowsy heads. Also I was to check time, to feed the mangles, and to carry trucks of Bird's Eye cloth to the girls who made diapers.

"Gimme some Bird's Eye, Mister. Can't you see I can't wait? . . . Go git me a case of bolsters right quick. . . How come you didn't give me some of them easy 36 x 36 like what you give Tazzie yestiddy?"

Flat, coarse, common voices of the Southern poor white drawled and shouted against the din of the motors. It seemed to me that the half hour for dinner would never come and then, after dinner, I felt that three o'clock was a century away. Through the windows I could glimpse the yellowed willows flanking the river beyond the dam and I wondered how any man could endure being a prisoner in the mills all his life while springs and autumns came to the world outside. Yet, some citizens were saying that we were spoiling the mill people by giving them a five-day week. It seemed to me that the sentence ought to be shortened even more.

2

THE finishing room was said to be the easiest department of the mill. I might not have lasted a month in one of the damp, dark rooms where harder work was done; what I had was hard enough. I did not possess adequate strength for the task I had. I was required to pull or push heavy loads of cloth up and down long aisles between the machines. The first few days I was dizzy and the veins of my arms and legs became painfully swollen: I had to go to the little mill doctor to have my limbs tightly bandaged to stop the blood from throbbing where it had formed in painful clots. I had been too tired to sleep soundly at night and, besides, I was unaccustomed to going to bed at eight o'clock in the evening and eating breakfast between five and six of a black morning.

Once I had an unusually heavy load. The wheels of my truck were locked. I strained and pulled and stretched but I could not make them turn. Several men, who could have moved my burden with ease if they had chosen to, stood by and laughed until two girls and a puny man came to my rescue. The men had their notions about educated

people in overalls and I had not begun to prove that I was democratic. They thought I was another boy with "pull" who would be in the big office after a brief pose as being just-one-of-the-workers. They did not know that I had no influential stockholder to boost my cause.

Slowly, however, I became friendly with the workers. The lady second-hand was kind to me and her example was imitated by others. I could not blame those who were suspicious at first. They were tired of laboring poseurs just as they were tired of tourists from the right side of the railroad tracks who came through in their fine clothes, looked at the laborers as though they were so many monkeys in a zoo, and tried to conceal the fact that they were thanking God for their superior fortunes.

One morning a matron in a seal coat came through with a party of out-of-town friends whom she was entertaining with a view of the great mill in action.

A gray-haired hemmer who had been in the mill since she was a small child could not contain herself; she put down her work and rushed up and down the line of sewing machines, creating a minor panic with every breath and step.

"Look at her, look at her, the stuck-up, biggety thing! She didn't see *me* but *I seen her* all right! She didn't see me. No, Gawd. She didn't see nobody but them swell folks she was with. Oh, Jesus me, if that ain't a case! Like I didn't recollect when she was hemmin' sheets for a livin'. Now she done got married to a little money and done forgot she ever worked in no cotton mill!"

The women and girls laughed and chattered and craned their necks for another glimpse of the vanishing matron in fur.

They worked hard and they were weary. They were glad to stop for two things, gossip and food. They spread

all manner of news and gloried in varied items from the *Danville Bee*. If they read in the paper that Miss Kitty Franz Penn had entertained with two tables of bridge at her charming home on West Main or that Miss Lizora Schoolfield of Forest Hills had spent the day in Greensboro they had something to discuss familiarly, as though *they* were intimately concerned. It was pitiable to hear Beulah say, "I seen in the *Bee* where the Conway girls went to New York," making the observation with the tone of voice which expressed idolatry I could not understand, although the girls in question happened to be my friends. Beulah talked as fast as she hemmed. Her topics, in addition to local society, were gruesome funerals and innumerable sick people who were so "bad off" they would die at any minute.

They worked, they gossiped, and they ate. How they ate! The amount of food consumed in the mill was truly astounding. Everyone stopped work to eat and to drink. As early as seven o'clock in the morning lunch baskets were opened. About that time one morning some girls offered me sour pickles and sweet potato pie which they were consuming ravenously. I tried to keep from offending them but the sight of the thick pastry made me shudder. I told them they hardly had enough for themselves. So they feasted largely and by nine-thirty, when the traveling lunch wagon appeared, they were ready for candy and soft drinks. It was not unusual for a worker making \$13 a week to spend nearly a dollar a week for coca-colas.

"I just can't get along without 'em," confessed Zella, a big putty-faced girl with a goiter. One day she drank eleven bottles of the South's favorite soft drink. Usually she took a few headache tablets at the same time because, in spite of the warning of the welfare ladies, she liked the effect of the combination.

Many of the girls I talked to were just as extravagant as Zella and had no thought of the future; they bought flashy wrist watches, radios, cheap furs, helped their husbands to buy new or second-hand cars or even bought them alone; they invested in beautifying permanent waves while their teeth deteriorated for lack of dental care. But there were a few girls—like Capitola—who were as shrewd as others were improvident. Capitola pressed pillow cases at the mangle and I talked to her several times a day when I assigned her work. She was a wiry, sallow-faced girl with crossed eyes and a shrill voice. She had come from a remote mountain section and still, after several years of town life, retained many of her primitive ways. She cursed freely, chewed tobacco upon occasions, hated all Negroes, and threatened to beat anyone who annoyed her; she was afraid of trains, telephones, and most manifestations of American progress. She was still impressed by the ladies' rest room. "We ought to put some pine brush by the door so Capitola can tell where she's at," the other girls snickered, thereby arousing the violent temper and a shower of oaths.

When the crowd rushed to the lunch wagon I saw that Capitola kept on working.

"You don't buy anything, do you?"

"Naw, I don't spend nary cent on no mess. But what you got to do with it, you long-legged rascal? I'm a bar-faced liar if you hadn't oughter mind yer own business."

"Don't be so ferocious, Capitola—"

"Dontcha cuss me, man! I won't take cuss words off nobody. If you mess with me, I'll smack the taste out'n yer mouth!"

She was in a particularly bad humor then but later, when we were conversing placidly, she told me that she paid \$4 of her average wages of \$14 for board and kept a dollar

or two for clothes and fifteen cents for the Wild West movies she attended every Saturday. Each week about eight dollars were hidden on her person, in her shoes or in her bosom; every now and then her savings were carried up in the mountains to her mother who locked the money in a trunk and guarded it for her daughter.

"Ma's keepin' it fer me," Capitola said. "Some day I'm gonna git mar'd back home an' then I'm gonna buy me a lot of hawgs an' raise me a mess of chillun."

Capitola and I became friendly and she told me all about the weaver who was the man of her heart's desire and the apple of her Ben Turpin eyes. We became so friendly, in fact, that she was interested in me to the extent of deploring my stubborn and dangerous notions. "How come you ain't gonna catch yer death of cold if you sleeps with yer windows open? Durned if you ain't a sight. Jus' las' week you was tellin' me how niggers ain't all mean an' hateful an' now you says I oughter sleep with fresh ar blowin' on my haid. Fer Christ's sake, man, where you git them tomfool ways? I know yer Ma didn't learn 'em to you."

3

REMEMBERING the lugubrious speeches of Mr. Gorman during the strike which I had viewed as a reporter I looked for signs of discontent now that I had a chance to hear the casual and informal talk of the workers themselves. Of course this was only one mill and its conditions were doubtless superior to those of many Southern textile plants; perhaps I should not have been persuaded too much by the fact that I heard few complaints from several hundred workers whom I questioned. They had been the goats in one strike, they said, and they wanted no more to do with the Union. Somebody else could have Mr. Gorman, they

said. Why take a second helping of commissary beans when \$13 a week would buy bread and coffee and a little meat?

The men workers congregated in the lavatories during their leisure moments and in these unattractive retiring-places I listened to their talk and weighed their words. Very rarely was there any criticism of the management; expressions of heresy were feared and condemned. The people were cowed by their former defeat and were taking no chances with their present status. When parts of the plant shut down and hands were idle and unpaid for weeks at a stretch, they said merely, "I guess there ain't no orders in the big office," and let the matter drop; they did not say that they were docked for every half hour they were idle for any unavoidable reason while the Boss Men were drawing salaries when attending Kiwanis conventions or when sick as much as when they reigned in an office. New Year's Day, for example, five hundred workers from one floor went home with lunches and clean uniforms and the cheerful thought that there would be no pay envelopes the next Friday. "Ain't no work," said the second-hand and the crowd turned homeward. I reached my street at the same hour when some of my more fashionable neighbors were returning noisily from New Year's parties and my family were just getting up for breakfast. Although I had fixed my own eggs and toast before six, the sight and smell of our cook's golden brown batter bread and roe herring proved tempting and I wanted to have a second breakfast. . . Viewing our plenty, I wondered what kind of a homecoming it was for some of the real workers when they were earning no wages; I realized that I could not understand their feelings. After all I was only a pretender: what was all of life for many would be no more than an interlude for me. The easiest comfort was found

in considering the mill workers as so many of us considered the Negroes. "Niggers are the happiest people in the South," I had been told many times. "Don't worry about the hovels many of them live in, don't bother about their hand-to-mouth existence. They're as carefree as larks." That did very well for a philosophy if you could forget educated Negroes you knew, intelligent men and women who were not happy as larks and never would be. It was the easiest consolation one could find. Even so it was comforting to say that the mill workers for the most part did not seem to feel mistreated or oppressed; I thought it was bad for them to live in houses with no bathrooms and, then, a doctor who visited mill families told me that the ones who had bathrooms in their houses would put coal and wood in the tubs and did not seem more satisfied than those who still had to go to the back yard.

Honestly I did not believe that many thought about injustices until Mr. Gorman or some other orator came along to stir them up. Nobody mentioned the fact that workers climbed long flights of stairs in going from floor to floor during work hours while salaried employees used the elevator. Just as one believed in the power of God one believed in the power of Boss Men: it was only to be hoped that the power would be used with fairness and mercy. Some of the supervisors were considerate enough but others were despicable, petty men who tried to make a fine impression in the office by saving money on labor, by the stretch-out system which the union spokesmen talked about so strongly. Certain overseers, and not infrequently those who had risen from the ranks of labor, felt that they must prove their authority by manifestations of tyranny. If you were wronged, what could you do—go to the president? Oh, no, the lesser lights would have no difficulty in disposing of tattlers.

These simple people I knew, weavers and doffers and carders and operators and seamers, were like defenseless children in many ways and it was easy for unscrupulous leaders, whether they were employers or organizers, to take advantage of them. Many could not read, many scratched little X marks when they were asked to sign their names. One Friday, when the red lights flashed on and we formed in the long line to receive our envelopes from the paymaster, we were given copies of the "CODE OF FAIR COMPETITION FOR THE COTTON TEXTILE INDUSTRY." The very first phrase of the impressive document was too much for a class of people who, if they could read at all, found the want ads, society columns, and comic strips of the *Bee* more to their taste: "To effectuate the policy of Title I of the National Industrial Recovery Act . . ." One might as well speak of Collective Bargaining, Paternalism, Humanitarianism.

"Land sakes!" one girl said. "I wouldn't read all this mess fer nothin'."

"I reckon you wouldn't!" rejoined her companion. "You couldn't make it out even if you had a mind to."

It was easier to accept than to question. There were times when I felt sure that there would be some expression of resentment toward the policies of the superiors. The attitude of the management toward accidents involving laborers enraged me when it appeared to be more concerned with the cost of insurance than with human suffering. It gave an overseer a poor rating in the executive offices if he had to report many accidents from his division. If you were hurt it was advisable to be a stoic as long as possible.

One day a girl on my side of the room sewed her finger while seaming pillow cases. Twice the sharp needle went through her flesh. She turned white and pale. I ran to

her and told her to go to the overseer at once and ask to see the mill doctor.

"Oh, no, don't tell nobody!" the girl cried as she tied a remnant firmly about her finger.

But in spite of her protest I told the second-hand who seemed to feel that my fear of rusty needles and blood poisoning was rather silly.

"Can you make out?" the girl was asked.

"Sure I can."

Then the second-hand turned to me.

"You ought not to've called me. She ain't hurt near as bad as all that. Now I'll have to make a report to the Safety Committee—and *we've had two accidents this month already.*"

There was considerable excitement, emotional excitement, over the stitched finger but there was no indictment of policies.

Such disturbances were soon forgotten. Yet they were the only breaks in the monotonous routine of a mill worker's day. If a girl fainted while working, everyone wanted a good look at her. If Ollie had lost her uncle or her first cousin, everyone wanted to know all about the funeral and, particularly, the mourning. If Posey knew somebody who knew the woman who was said to have been attacked by a nigger, then Posey was the hero of the day.

When there were no soul-stirring tragedies and scandals, merriment was a fair second choice. If Buster and Jewel got married Saturday night, they were targets of rough jokes all the next week. The mill worker's favorite sex tale was a drummer's yarn about studs and unsatisfied maidens: there were dozens of versions but the theme was essentially the same. A marriage provoked many of these tales.

A favorite pastime in leisure moments, when one was not gossiping or pulling out another cold ham-and-egg soda biscuit from the lunch basket, was playing pranks on anybody who seemed to be a likely victim. There was one beloved mirth-provoking prank called "goosing." It consisted in catching a worker when he was unaware of danger and giving him a piercing poke in the posterior which would cause him to jump suddenly and appear monstrously comical to all who watched.

One note on goosing I could never forget. "Uncle George" was the familiar title of Superintendent George Robertson. When news was brought that Uncle George was on the ground floor everybody started cleaning up; lunch baskets and copies of the *Bee* were hidden; everybody was working industriously and all signs of levity were concealed when the solemn-faced executive made his tour of inspection.

One day, just after the superintendent had completed an especially critical tour and everyone was beginning to relax again, a thin, emaciated, little man with humped shoulders, said, "Say, Buddie, what would you do if you was to git a million dollars?"

"Why, I haven't the least idea, Buck. What would you do?"

"I know goddam well what I'd do. If I was to git a million dollars I'd run up behind all these here Boss Mens what acts biggety and I'd goose every durned one real hard in the tail and then I wouldn't stop till I was clean out'n the gate."

"Then what would you do with your million dollars?"

"I'd buy me a big new fillin' station on the Martinsville Road and I'd just set up there sellin' gas and I wouldn't know I'd ever seen no cotton mill."

"That sounds fine enough."

"It sure do. But I better be hopin' I don't git laid off again next week. I'm behind on my rent already."

4

WHILE I was in the mill I spent occasional free moments in noting my impressions on pink and blue slips of paper intended for ordering cloth. One afternoon after work hours I saw Laurence Stallings who had come down from New York to his country place near Danville; he asked me if I had written anything about the textile laborers, for it was his way to be considerate of my efforts and to talk to me as though I might have been an author, too, even if I could hope merely to make sixty or seventy dollars on an article whereas he made as much as several thousand dollars for a story much shorter than my article. I laughed at the comedy of our comparing notes but Laurence said he knew what it was to be poor and, besides, he knew I'd be wanting to make a thousand dollars, too, if I could.

Anyway, I was pleased when Laurence showed interest in what I was trying to do. I told him curious tales about people in my town and he would threaten to record them but he never did. For example, I told him about Old Man Harvey: Old Man Harvey was a decrepit gentleman in his eighties who had been sitting on his front porch ever since he retired from the tobacco business many years before; always he sat on one side of his porch and always he chewed tobacco, the amazing result being that grass flourished on one side of the yard while the other side was entirely bare because of the great quantity of brown juice that had been spat upon it during Old Man Harvey's long term as sitter and chewer. The Harvey's one-sided lawn was a sight to behold.

"If you don't write that down, I'm going to use it my-

self," Laurence said and I told him to take what he liked from Danville but he passed it all by; he was forever leaving to go to Hollywood or some other far-away place. Well, I could understand that. We all wanted to make more money and there was no sense in bluffing.

Here I was discontent with the maximum of \$13 a week earned at the mill and gathering my scattered notes in a piece which I showed to Laurence. He said it was all right; so I sent it off to my same Mrs. Meloney and got seventy-five dollars in return. This proved to be embarrassing. Work hours had been becoming few and far between, so I had quit the mill just before the article appeared describing me as *one of the workers*. This sounded pathetic indeed and a friend in New York, who thought anybody who had left New York for the South had left heaven for hell, wanted to advance me money to free me from troubles which no longer existed and had never been as bad as she thought.

The Sunday of my appearance as a mill worker in print, the little news-stand, to the proprietor's amazement, sold eighty copies of the *Herald Tribune* which was never so popular in a Democratic town. The mill people wanted to read my effusion or get somebody to read it to them. The papers were borrowed and exchanged for weeks. Girls who had been friendly with me in the mill made faces at me now as I went my solitary way along Main Street. Approval was rare and lukewarm. But among the denunciations, which were to be expected by anyone who expressed the slightest dissatisfaction with any aspects of capitalistic processes in the South, there was a brief note from the Virginia lady who had told me to learn to write before writing. "Your article gives a very good picture of life in the mill," she said. "Why don't you try other articles of this kind?" From that novelist to me this was

encouragement indeed and I felt as though I might overlook more ugly faces on Main Street if I could win more such approval.

But how humiliating to recall that I had just joined the Santa Claus army when people were feeling sorry for me because I was supposed to be a forgotten man! I was one of the forgotten men whom Roosevelt and the Brain Trust were ardently discovering; the Sunday the papers spoke of me as a Southern mill worker I was already on the roll.

The picnic of C.W.A. had begun and all I had to do was to go to the bountiful table and help myself from the generous serving of Federal checks. At first I did not know what it was all about; all I knew was that boys I had been to high school with were now in charge of large sums of money sent to us by the government. All I had to do was to take a job. Well, at first I was paid \$27 per week and I was to be a "statistician," although figures had been my weakness all my life. It was my job to make weekly reports on the number of persons in our district who were unemployed, to classify applicants on the rapidly changing forms, and to list a quantity of information which might possibly have been useful even if I could not see that it was. It seemed to me that it would have been better to report that the politicians' followers were in on the best prizes while many unknowns waited in the cold. People were giving up perfectly good jobs in town to accept more remunerative positions in the service of Mr. Roosevelt and of our local representatives whom they began to praise inordinately as soon as they were on the payroll.

Soon I ceased to be surprised at anything I saw in our state. People seemed to be crazed by this sudden outpouring of money from the Federal Treasury. Officials actually sent telegrams from one building to another in a small town where such an extravagance was unprecedented!

Persons who had never worked before in their lives were established in offices. Some young men I knew who had been employed at small wages on unimportant jobs were made heads of bureaus with impressive salaries and private secretaries to make their reports to headquarters while they enjoyed their new roles as executives. It was all too good to be true and they were afraid they would wake up and find that they were dreaming. One overnight executive I knew tried pitifully hard to excel! His travel expenses were so enormous that they were even more than the generous New Dealers could permit. "But look at my fine reports," he said. "See all the poor devils I've placed in jobs with private industries." His defense was eloquent but it did not have evidence behind it. I was with the officials who disclosed the sad facts that the executive's reports were products of his imagination, that the poor devils among the unemployed had never heard of him, that most of his traveling had been done in the local pool room.

A case like that, however, offset as it was by the history of hundreds of honest but mediocre persons who went to the bureaus and did whatever the politicians told them to do, made a dull story indeed, when I think of Miss X who worked — or rather who occupied a chair — in one of several bureaus by which I was employed. Miss X was a fluttery-eyed baby blonde with beauty parlor curls and a face which advertised L. Herman's best cosmetics. She was, so we had been told, a stenographer. But she could not take a letter, she typed amateurishly, she could neither spell nor figure. She was better at sweet-talking men than she was at anything else: when a very churchy politician came in, she ran to the ladies' room and wiped the rouge from her lips; when an openly eye-for-legs politician dropped by, she dolled up artfully and cooed like a dove.

Miss X was easily enraged. One day, just about the

time when they were talking of Merit Exams which were never to be seen, I made her angry by discovering the fact that she had never heard of Miss Frances Perkins although our bureau was supposed to be directed by the Department of Labor.

"You're just trying to get me in trouble," she said in her most beguiling tone of the mistreated maiden. "It looks like to me you'd want to help me. You know, if it won't for my little brother and I, my family would be in an awful fix—"

Little Brother was on the government, too. But whenever Miss X's inefficiency was mentioned, she began her tale of poor Little Brother and herself bringing in the groceries.

"I've even got to pay Papa's gas bill," she would say.

As soon as her inefficiency was dismissed for a while as something nobody could help, and other employees reconciled themselves to doing her share of the work, she was in her glory again and her big watery brown eyes fluttered with joy. She drove her car to work haughtily and was indignant when the alley was blocked by taxis bringing Negroes to their relief jobs in the mattress factory. Then she was bubbling over with pleasure: she was going to the beauty parlor, she had a date with a *darling* man, she was planning a *lovely* bridge party, she was going to buy the *cutest* earrings, she had many ways to spend her government money besides purchasing the groceries or paying the gas bill.

Miss X happened to be just below me in the bureau line-up and there were times when I became weary of performing tasks which were rightly hers; she would insist on doing her reports and it would not worry her at all that someone else had to do them over again. One day an efficient stenographer was added to our staff and I spoke of

showing her how to do Miss X's reports. The fluttery brown eyes spied trouble and the blonde head was fairly bursting with wrath and fury.

"Miss Y is not going to learn how to do my work," she said, "and you're not going to show her how. You're just trying to freeze me out! It's all a frame-up."

"You can't do the work," I replied. "You might as well let someone else do it. You know you'll still get your check, so what do you care? You can just sit out in the hall and look pretty. But certainly it's not fair for other people to stay overtime making reports you are paid to be doing."

Miss X went out to get the politicians. They began to arrive casually, one after the other, those upstanding local rulers who felt that the New Deal would be lost without them.

"Miss X is a nice girl," my superior was told by a gentle-voiced but influential man about town. "Her father's paid taxes here and served the Democratic Party all his life. She's entitled to her job and you must keep her in it."

"But it happens that she can't do the job."

"Now I just know you can make out if you want to. If you can't, why don't you get rid of the ones who do the complaining?"

It so happened that the one who was doing the chief complaining was not going to be so easily disposed of. It was not a question of being unfair to Miss X, since we knew she would be provided for just as Little Brother would be; it was a question of being unfair to ourselves who were obliged to do her work while she sat and smiled. My superior agreed with me, although he did not know what to do about the politicians; he had a wife to support and could not afford to be too independent.

But we went straight ahead and taught Miss Y how to

do Miss X's work and Miss X sat in the hall and entertained her admirers of the opposite sex. In her spare moments she was conducting a campaign of libel. She rushed from one office to another with spicy little bits which usually got back to us before the end of the day. The real serpent hiding in Miss X uncoiled itself from the depths of her being one day when she was especially uneasy about her holdings in the Danville branch of Roosevelt and Company; seizing the fact that I had stayed over the week-end with a friend and her children in a nearby town while the master of the house was away, Miss X, who was desperately in need of ammunition, shrugged her plump shoulders suggestively and enigma was expressed by a gurgling voice and wide innocent eyes.

"He's got lots of people tricked. He's not so *capable* as you think. And his *character's* not so *perfect*. He just gets by with more, that's all. It's real cute the way he goes to church *every Sunday*, isn't it? It's real cute the way he spends week-ends with married ladies when their husbands are away, isn't it? That's just lovely. Oh, no, I don't know a thing. He's just a *perfect* worker for the government. I'm the only one who's *dumb*—"

Then another bright idea entered beneath the beauty waves of Miss X's girlish blonde head. She bargained with a friend. The friend wrote letters to the capitol to inform the administration that my superior and I, especially the latter, were rude to people who visited our bureau and that we were generally unworthy of being associated with the wonderful New Deal. So investigators were sent and they happened to be shrewd gentlemen who lost no time in tracing the friend's nearness to Miss X.

Miss X was fired. She turned white when she got her letter of dismissal and I heard that a paternal shot-gun was on my trail. But some religio-political friends secured for

Miss X a routine clerical job with a private business, a simple job more suited to her talents than the compilation of reports. So she departed victoriously after all. Now I had another enemy. Sunday mornings, when I would pass her on Main Street as I went after my New York papers, she was much dressed and beautified in her turban and furs; she was hastening to add her voice to a choir of Christians. As I went by, her fluttery brown eyes looked beyond me and above me and her baby blonde face, over its coat of L. Herman's best powder and rouge, bore a sneer of withering contempt.

5

Just about the time my grape hyacinths were blooming in the rockery and when it was safe to walk out-of-doors again without an overcoat, a very small man appeared to create a very large panic. I saw him for the first time when he came to our bureau to tell me that he would consider offering his services if any particularly interesting position might be available.

A flabby little white hand was extended across my desk and a voice that was hardly more than a whisper introduced its owner by a name which I shall call Goldman, although it was not precisely that.

Mr. Goldman may have been Russian or Jewish or most anything else; he was too much of an individual to be classified at all. As he laid his hat, gloves, and cane on my desk and proceeded to sit as primly as an old maid on the chair before me, I surveyed him in amazement. His lean face was topped by oily black hair but his sideburns, his goatee, and his flowing mustachios were of red-gold silky hairs. His small nose was sensitive and sharp. His brown eyes looked straight ahead and never lost for a

moment their expression of unfathomable mystery. Mr. Goldman was the oddest, meekest, and vaguest specimen of man imaginable.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Goldman?"

"I am," came the slow, solemn response of the delicate voice, "I am a retired gentleman of leisure. Shall I speak to you quite candidly in order that you may avail yourself of my services if some position suitable to my unusual abilities should present itself?"

"By all means, Mr. Goldman," I urged. I was fascinated. I could not believe my own eyes and ears.

"As I just informed you, I am a retired gentleman. I have attained eminent skill in many lines of endeavor. I am most versatile and accomplished. I am an accountant, an inventor, a song composer, and an author of distinction."

"What kind of writing do you do, Mr. Goldman?"

"I am a poet. I have written a dissertation on metaphysical matters. I am the author of 'The Eternal Sovereign and Divine Lord Absolute of the Universe.' It's copyrighted."

"Certainly it *sounds* impressive. I'd like to see it."

"It is a lofty, sublime work. It is only for the few. It is superior to the masses. Perhaps, after I know you better, I shall find you worthy of the honor of reading my works."

"Thank you very much. Tell me, where are you staying, Mr. Goldman?"

"I have purchased a country estate on the Crooktown Road. I am in retirement there."

"On the Crooktown Road! Why, you must be mistaken. Nobody but colored people live out there."

"I live there. Yes, all my neighbors are of the Negro race, lovely, kind people they are. Will you call some day and view my new home? It is the answer to a dream. I am so happy in it. I had achieved distinction in so many

fields and there was nothing left for me to strive for, so I longed for a quiet retreat in Virginia. I came down from New York and viewed the Cavalier Hotel at Virginia Beach. It was pleasant there but I traveled inland and decided to make Danville my home."

"Why did you choose Danville?"

"Oh, Danville is not unknown to the world."

After a great exchange of compliments my diminutive guest departed at last. As he went out of the office a brawny, square-faced steel riveter said to me, "For God's sake, what is that, Boss? I know it ain't no man."

That same afternoon I borrowed my father's car and drove out past the mills and down through the shacks and tenements of Crooktown Road. A mail box marked "Goldman," just beyond a Negro cottage, caught my eye and I stopped. At first I saw only a broomsedge field with a pine grove at the back and I thought the residence was concealed by the trees. But why in the world was the johnny-house right out in the front of the field instead of at the back where it could not be seen from the road so easily? Trust Mr. Goldman to be different, I thought.

Some kinky-head Negro girls came out on the porch of their cottage.

"He ain't at home," they called. I drew nearer and sought information from the oldest of the girls, a brown-skin Negress with a broad nose and white teeth glistening between thick brown lips.

"Where's his house? Is it behind the pine grove?"

The girl doubled up with glee.

"That's his house right befo' yer eyes, Mister. Ever'body thinks it's somethin' else but he *lives* in it. See the window? *What you thought it was* don't have no windows."

Led by the girls, I approached the one-room structure.

It was newly built and the fresh lumber bore a sharp, clean odor. There was one window and a door. The entire interior was no larger than our dog house at home and not half as large as the doll house a coca-cola magnate had built for his small daughter on his estate in Forest Hills. It was big enough for a small cot, a chair, and a table. Mr. Goldman's suitcase was under the cot.

"Where does he cook?"

"He gits most his somethin' t'eat in town. Sometimes he brings corn flakes an' sich as that out here."

"Tell me about him. How long has he been here?"

"He ain't been here so long. At first we was all skeered to death when he come out here to live with we colored folks. We set up all night when he first come but he didn't never bother nobody. He just studies his own business. He just sets an' reads 'cep' when he goes to the spring or down to the woods. An' he goes to town mighty nigh ever' day. An' he gits letters with money in 'em."

The Negroes may have lost their fear of Mr. Goldman but other people were increasingly alarmed. The small foreigner had incited a variety of suspicions. When he went to the real-estate firm to pay for his land on the Crooktown Road, a leading capitalist and Rotarian of our town sought to learn more about his eccentric customer.

"What nationality do you belong to, Mr. Goldman?" said the citizen.

"I am an American," answered Mr. Goldman. "And, may I ask please, to what nationality do you belong?"

Mr. Goldman was baffling. He gave no clues. Policemen watched every move he made. They decided that he was a Communist, a textile organizer, a dope peddler. They feared that he would blow up our banks and mills.

"He looks innocent," some said, "but them's the kind

what causes the most trouble. I bet you my las' dollar he's one of them *Comm-u*-nists. We oughter run the las' one of the lot out of this country."

At a local restaurant there was excitement when Mr. Goldman ordered breakfast at eleven o'clock and, as soon as he finished that bountiful Virginia meal, he ordered the regular lunch: all the while he looked straight ahead of him as though he was wholly oblivious of his surroundings. After he had consumed his two meals at one sitting, he came up to the government offices and asked for me.

"Mrs. Brown, my colored neighbor, said that you visited me at my country home," he said, laying his cane and gloves very carefully on my desk and pulling up his coat-tail before he sat down in front of me. "I regret exceedingly that I missed the pleasure of your society. You are so kind to me."

"Why, Mr. Goldman, I haven't done a thing for you."

"Oh, but you converse with me so cordially, so intelligently. It was worth coming South to know you. I consider you most eminent and I shall commend you most highly. I endorse your personality."

"You flatter me. And I'm afraid you'd find few people here to agree with you. By the way, Mr. Goldman, the people here think you are a Communist."

"Communist? How interesting!"

"Well, that's a broad term in Danville and it doesn't mean what it was intended to. For example, my uncle once said *I* was a Communist because I said it might not be a bad idea for the University of Virginia to elect a Northerner as its president. To say that you are a Communist means that your views, whether political or religious or social, are not acceptable. Few persons who talk about Communists know what a Communist is. My little sister came home

from school the other day and asked me if I was *really a Communist*. Atheism, Communism, etc. are carelessly used terms in this part of the country."

My guest's brown eyes never brightened; there was no sign of his interest being unduly aroused.

"Very remarkable. There seems to be some great misunderstanding. I am not a member of any one party or creed. I am a student of all beliefs. I am a rare cosmopolite and a detached observer. In short, I am a man of the world. . . Now tell me, what did you think of my estate?"

"Well, I thought it was a little small. But, perhaps, you'll add to it?"

"Oh, no, it's quite comfortable as it is. You must come again after I do some interior decorating."

"I can't help wondering what you'll do about bathing facilities."

"Bathing is not to my taste. I prefer creams and lotions. Some of my tastes are European, you see."

"And I'm afraid you'll be lonely out there with those Negroes."

"A man of my eminent attainments enjoys solitude. I wish to sit quietly and meditate on my past accomplishments. The peace and tranquillity of my little home make me very happy, and perhaps you'll allow me to come here from time to time? When I know you better I hope to find you worthy of a copy of 'The Eternal Sovereign and Divine Lord Absolute of the Universe.'"

"Thank you, Mr. Goldman."

More beautiful compliments were passed. Whenever he came into the office now, a few people, who had become more curious than afraid, tried vainly to make him talk to them; he looked straight ahead and waited for me. He was not the fool some people thought he was and he had

no intention of trusting those who, because it was customary for them to suspect whatever they could not understand, would have believed the worst of him and caught him in a trap. His attachment to me was touching and I was glad to tell sensible citizens that I had learned authoritatively that Mr. Goldman was a graduate of New York University who had saved his money and come to Danville for the very reasons he avowed; the house on the Crooktown Road was what he could afford and we must not be afraid because he had no aversion to Negro neighbors.

There was something strangely sad but absurd in the spectacle of a large, armed policeman shadowing a frail, delicate little man who was, I believed, as far as any dangerous acts or evil thoughts were concerned, probably the most exemplary of citizens.

6

THERE seemed to be an epidemic of visitors that month but all did not receive the meager offering of Old Virginia hospitality which was extended to Mr. Goldman. A stranger who was no less eccentric than the new resident of Crooktown came to us with the right kind of line for the new South and immediately was enfolded to Danville's bosom like a long-lost friend. This personage was Jay Wellington, Esquire, of Hollywood, California. Mr. Wellington introduced himself as the director of a great school of cinematic art in the movie capital; he would not have left his budding Barrymores and Garbos if he had not felt it his duty as a Christian and as an Artist to carry his great pageant, "Let There Be Light," to the darkest corner of our country.

The work, which was subtitled "A Spiritual Illumina-

tion of the NRA," cheerfully endorsed the Rooseveltian plans, according to its author. A copy had been submitted to the White House and had won a letter of appreciation from a New Deal secretary who was speaking for *the President himself*: the idea of incorporating the New Deal in a Biblical drama would appeal to the masses and was therefore worthy of official sanction.

When our preacher decided to sponsor Mr. Wellington I was elected to a committee. This was the first invitation of any kind which I had received in a long time. The Shakespeare Club had not asked me to make any more Cultural talks, nobody asked me to join anything; I was not in the Young Men's Business Club, the Young Democrats, the St. Andrew's Brotherhood, the Lions, or the Willing Workers. Now and then I had curiosity about what was happening: so now, when I was unexpectedly asked to help with the pageant, I did not decline; on the contrary I joined in with fervor. From the outset I was enchanted.

Mr. Wellington was an egregiously corpulent man with an immense head of black hair turning gray and a large fleshy face which he was capable of changing to suit any role of his extensive repertoire. When he outlined his drama in the Sunday School room of Epiphany Church, he wore a bright-colored smock over his immense bay window; and his spectacles hung on a black ribbon from the ample red neck above his open collar. His voice was a throaty sort of male contralto. He shut his brown eyes tight while he talked; it seemed that he felt more aesthetic by forgetting the immediate scene, the benches full of raw recruits to the Drama, and the high school girls who were dreaming of the short cut to Hollywood.

"This will be no mere amateur production," Mr. Wellington said in Shakespearian tones, his puffy lids firmly sealed and his face tense with earnestness. "In two weeks

I shall have all of you *living and breathing* your roles just as my actors do in my great movie studio in Hollywood. This will be the most mag-ni-fi-cent production ever staged in Danville. It will have a cast of hundreds—”

Indeed I feared at first that everyone in town would be on the stage and there would be nobody left for an audience. But Mr. Wellington explained to me privately his working plan: if there were five hundred in the cast, this guaranteed an audience of several thousand since, if little Dorothy May Jones was a Pilgrim of the Light, her Mama, Papa, and Granny, would pay fifty cents each to see her walk across the platform draped in a sheet—and think how many Dorothy Mays there would be! And there were to be representatives of the American Legion, Gold Star Mothers, and everybody who was anybody. You could not fail.

Jay Wellington, Esquire, was a born salesman. He told us not to speak of the tickets as plain tickets.

“This is too *spiritual* an undertaking to be put on a commercial basis,” he said in a hushed, solemn manner. “Call the tickets ‘Messengers of the Light.’ But *don’t stop* until every man, woman, and child in Danville has bought at least one Messenger.”

Publicity was flourishing and the *Bee* was buzzing merrily over the prospect of leading citizens appearing bare-legged and startlingly costumed as John the Baptist or the Four Wise Men. Who was to play the Christus? This was to be a secret but it was announced that Miss Lemma Starling, pretty daughter of Al Starling of the Virginia Hardware, would be Mary and would ride across the platform on a live donkey. People could hardly wait.

Mr. Wellington devised a red-folder program to be sold for five cents a copy and space in its pages was at a premium. I was one of three who were to sell the advertising

and the director insisted that we be paid a percentage of the proceeds.

"Everybody works better when paid. This is a great dramatic production, a marvelous *spiritual* adventure. We don't want to be commercial. But when you go out to sell this program, I want you to bring home the bacon. Lots of bacon!"

All the merchants bought spaces; they could not fail to cooperate in an undertaking which involved most of their customers. In a few hours I made a large sum for Mr. Wellington and the church and fifteen dollars in commissions for myself. Nobody on my list was hard to sell except Mrs. Mamie Kidd who was running a dining-room assisted by her son Franklin, who had once been a Chicago tenor but was at present on a prolonged visit to Mama. Mrs. Kidd had been leading the W.C.T.U. for years and I had seen her picture in the *Bee* enough to recognize her little friendly face; she did not look at all like a temperance leader. She was behind the counter when I arrived and Franklin, a serious, important-looking man with slick black hair, was humming an aria as he walked about the dining-room.

When I finished my sales talk, Mrs. Kidd called her son from his musical reveries.

"Frank, ain't this the show you're in?"

Franklin strode forth and looked over my dummy for the program.

"Why, yes, Mama, I'm going to sing the leading solo, 'The Lord is My Light.'"

"Well, then, Son, I think we might take a ad, since you're in the program. We can connect your solo with my dining-room. I could get a space *right by your name* on the program. Here, give me that pencil. It would be nice like this:

PROGRAM		
EAT WITH MRS.	(cont.) Tenor Solo	DRINK
MAMIE	<i>The Lord Is My Light</i>	COCA
KIDD	FRANKLIN KIDD	COLA

"That would be nice, wouldn't it?"

Franklin frowned perceptibly as he faced his mother.

"But, Mama, you wouldn't say 'Eat With Mrs. Mamie Kidd.' Surely you'd say 'Dine With Mrs. Mamie Kidd'! With that change it will be a fine ad. Young man, will you be sure that Mama's ad and my name appear exactly opposite each other on the program?"

"Oh, of course," I hastened to add before I rushed down the street to report another victory to Mr. Jay Wellington. . .

Everything went smoothly from then on and when the appointed time came at last the Armory was jammed with spectators. Accompanied by concealed sopranos and violin obligatos, the tableaux were enacted by Rotarians in sheets and dignitaries in tights; all the overflow of actors were disposed of as Pilgrims of the Light who took a long time to cross the stage but, as Mr. Wellington said, for every little Pilgrim in the cast there was at least a Mama in the audience.

The grand finale of the show ended rather abruptly with banner-waving for the New Deal but the general idea, I think, was that the Bible and the New Deal taught similar truths. Anyway, when Mr. Wellington departed to continue his tour of America he left many admirers and, although he disliked mention of monetary matters, it might not be too unaesthetic to add that he made several hundred dollars for a fortnight of labor.

As far as I could learn there was only one complaint. A ragged old Negro who had brought the donkey to bear Miss Lemma Starling across the platform was not satisfied with his remuneration.

"I brung dis here jackass ev'y night fer mighty nigh a week an', after all de money dey done took in, dis here man gimme jis one dollar, jis one dollar."

7

At this time it seemed to be unfashionable to speak of monotony or anything kin to boredom in smaller places of our nation. The attitudes of Sinclair Lewis and my unseen correspondent in Baltimore were no longer in vogue. Magazines were printing articles in praise of the Simple Life: I'm Tired of the City, Let's Go Back to the Old Home Town. So it probably sounded disappointing to say that there were days when I wished that I were walking up Madison Avenue once more, hours when I went along Main Street thinking how wonderful it might be if I could go to sleep and awaken in a room near the Champs de Mars. And perhaps it was a confession of weakness to say that I rejoiced to see certain people whom I still associated with larger cities of a world beyond our little world of mills and churches and safely comfortable homes.

Gardening in April was an incomparably satisfactory occupation: the old-fashioned white and purple lilacs were in blossom and the japonicas shed their pink and red petals over the new grass. Some days I could work for hours at a time with trowel, hoe, and rake, but there were other times when too much solitude was just as unbearable as too much society. I left my cowslips to the chickweeds and wild onions when Laurence or Helen Stallings drove in my alley from their country place near town. They were

people whom I liked immensely and their presence in Danville gave me endless amusement and delight.

Helen had gone on a fishing trip somewhere in North Carolina and Laurence was supposed to be in hiding. He had started several manuscripts, one of which, as I remembered, began beautifully with the picture of a superbly described old woman in a poke bonnet (much better than Faulkner's old women, I thought); the old woman was riding in an open wagon down a Southern road. Unfortunately she did not get far, for just about that time Laurence dropped writing for photography; he was a professional with his cameras and even did his own developing and the rest of the mystifying processes. One night he brought a fine German outfit to my house and asked me to go with him to the Broadway Theatre where some Georgia Peach or other was scheduled to do a fan dance which ought to make a perfect shot. So we hastened downtown to the narrow little movie house which was full of tobacco farmers, mill workers, and local enthusiasts of feminine pulchritude. The place was hot and stuffy and malodorous. I was afraid that Laurence, who, as everyone knows, had lost a leg in the War, would stumble in the dark aisle; but he kept right on until we found seats near the front. To Laurence's disgust the fan dance had been canceled but there were some amazingly ugly ladies in pink tights: when they appeared, lifting their wrinkling legs and shrieking their jazz like a line of lunatics, Laurence stood in the middle of the aisle and clicked his camera. The audience became more interested in the photographer than in the display of limbs and, if he had been absorbed much longer, I think we would have been shown to the door by the Broadway's single usher.

I was sorry I could not be a better host to a man whom I was indebted to for many reasons. He was a notably

learned man and he had introduced me to books which became the best of friends in times when life was slightly less than perfect. "You would like Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*," he had said casually and that volume gave me memories I could never lose. But the influence of a fine mind might have caused nothing warmer than reasonable admiration. There were little things which Laurence did, little human acts which would have marked him as a superior person in my opinion even if he had never written plays and stories. One evening I had been at his house in New York when the living-room happened to be unusually furnished with celebrities. Almost everybody seemed to be famous. Tom Wolfe, highball in hand and the visionary look on his face, was telling an earthy tale about one of his uncles which was to appear later in *Of Time and the River*. Julia Peterkin had just breezed in, looking very regal in a flowing green gown and seeming to be in a vivacious and light-hearted mood. An eminent editor was sighing for the good old days. A sculptor was almost as mute as any of his statues. Everybody seemed to be *somebody* except me and it might not have been unnatural for a lady to suppose that a young man would never have strayed into this company unless he was one of those bright young men whom certain New York circles cherish one year and drop the next. Anyway, the lady said, "And what do *you* do?" Just as I was preparing to confess that I had done nothing especially astounding, Laurence turned away from Wolfe's long tale for a minute and said with a straight face, "He's a good critic, don't you know his work?" This bewildered me at the time and I steered the lady to other subjects. She did not know that the words of our host were not always to be considered seriously.

Laurence was just as unpredictable and changeable as this April weather in Virginia. He told me one afternoon that

he would not come to town again for weeks and he drove in the next morning: a sudden spell of economy had led him to purchase some bright blue summer suits and he was wearing one of these brilliant outfits when we visited his friend, Mr. Skinner, the fish dealer and politician. Laurence liked to talk to this enormous, red-faced man who was reminiscent of Falstaff and who prided himself upon being the only man in Danville who read the Congressional Record. It was reported that Mr. Skinner did not admire Laurence so extravagantly as he once did; he had been disillusioned about the literary talent of his friend when he failed to win a cigarette testimonial prize even after Laurence had lent a professional touch to the Skinner entry. Nevertheless, he made himself agreeable and entertained us with an eloquent speech in praise of his fish and oysters and of his own mental superiority.

After listening to a few of the fish dealer's tales we went to the kodak store where we purchased more photographic supplies which meant, I thought regretfully, that Laurence would not complete the writings I had liked. Then we went to the drug store and then there was nothing else to do.

Laurence turned to me in wonder.

"What the hell do you do here? Isn't there any place to go?"

"The other night I went to a convention of the Woodmen of the World—"

"Seriously, how do you *pass time*?"

I told him that I worked my garden and read; but he seemed to think that I was holding back on him. Sunday afternoon he came in town again; now he was very dressed-up in English tweeds and a new hat and looked just as elegant as he had looked disreputable the day before.

"Isn't there any place to go here on Sunday? Isn't there

any place we might have a drink and hear some music?"

"For music, we might go over to the Methodist Church and hear Basil Browder sing a sacred number—or, since he has a carrying voice, we can sit in my garden and hear him just as well. For drinks, we might go to Dowdytown and get some corn liquor in a mason jar or, if you feel quieter, we could drive to the drug store, honk your horn after the fashion of the town, and the curb boy will bring you a coca-cola. That's the life."

"Well," Laurence said with a suddenly naive tone which was surprising in anyone so urbane, "even in Macon, Georgia, I knew a place to go on Sunday."

Laurence was no more ready for my kind of solitude than he was for the busy life of town people hurrying up and down the street to drink a coca-cola or to find a game of bridge or to see who had dates with whom. He was restless among us and I was sorry but not surprised that his visits were short. He stayed a few days and then he was off again for New York or California or Europe. His residence never caused much excitement except upon an occasion when the *Bee* reported inexplicably that Miss Joan Crawford, of all people, was a guest at his home. Fortunately he had departed when cars appeared at his gate filled with local movie fans who sought a glimpse of a Hollywood star in the flesh; such an exhibition would not have afforded him much pleasure.

If Laurence had been able to farm and to garden actively, I think he might have liked to stay longer and what happened or did not happen in towns would not have bothered him. The reason his wife stayed longer when she came was that she wanted to plant seeds and roots and watch them grow. She came into my garden and investigated each wild flower in the rockery and every bud and

blossom in the serpentine borders: she appreciated my narcissi and was just as excited as I was when phlox *subulata* or some other horticultural wonder appeared among the candytuft and ferns. Helen, who had been correctly described by Miss Glasgow as a genuine person, possessed an unusual quality of mind as much as she possessed more perceptible distinctions. She became absorbed in the life of various places and the fact that she had lunched with Mr. Woollcott, let us say, the day before, was one thing and her perusal of growing things in Virginia today was another. Once, when she was just back from long and varied travels and I was eager for news of people she had seen and places she had visited, her talent for adapting herself quickly to new surroundings struck me as never before. When I asked what she thought of Maxine Elliott, she was eager to tell me about a first brood of turkeys at Yanceyville. When I inquired about Somerset Maugham, she had more interest in the bulbs which had been dug up by the faithful but clumsy Negro who tended her flowers. When I wanted to know whether Tibbett sang much at the California house party she had attended, she reported in the affirmative briefly and led me to a discussion of crepe myrtles and the care of roses.

8

MEANWHILE, off and on, I had stayed with the government bureau. My wages varied from \$13.50 to \$25 per week and it was nothing out of the ordinary to be fired one week and hired again the next. The bureaus seemed uncertain as to what they wanted to do and I suppose there would not have been enough work for some of the people in Washington if they had not made frequent changes in the set-up throughout the states. Really it did not make much

difference to me; for I had no feeling of permanence attached to this government business. I could not grasp the idea of the new recruits who seemed to feel that they had an easy berth for life. I could not believe that money could come so easily forever.

Close contacts with unemployment and relief in a small town were truly depressing. At one extreme there were people who were trying to sit down on the government; at another extreme there were employers who seemed to think starvation wages preferable to relief; somewhere in the middle there were the deserving people who were genuinely in need. It was too big a problem to be handled by the incompetent relatives and campaign boosters of the local politicians.

The events of any day in the bureau were too bewildering for anyone who cared about anything except his own green check. Once we were making an especial effort to get private jobs for relief clients who were beginning to prefer "Prez-i-dent Rooziewelt" above all other employers. Certain citizens had complained that they had difficulty in securing servants because of the F.E.R.A. and other agencies of the generous New Deal.

When one fastidious lady asked for a temporary house worker I sent her an energetic colored girl named Della. In better times Della had been a hotel chambermaid and she could be recommended as an excellent cleaner. She was a friendly, grinning black soul who wore clean blue uniforms and starched white collars and cuffs. At my suggestion she went cheerfully to the address I gave her one Friday morning. I did not hear from her again until Tuesday when I phoned her lodging-house beyond the depot. It was Della who answered the phone. Her voice was ineffably weary and sad.

"Is that you, Della? I just wanted to ask about your work."

"Dis here is me all right but I's sick in bed. Tell me, suh, how come you seen fit to put dat white lady off on me?"

"What do you mean? Wasn't she good—"

"Good! Lemme tell you, suh, I ain't never seen her like. I started in early in de mornin'. She say she was goin' on a trip an' I was gonna git her ready. Well, Jesus, I washt all her undiclothes an' all her husban's shirts an' B.V.D.'s an' a whole mess of chillun's stuff. An' in de evenin' a thunder storm come up whilst I was takin' all dem clothes off de line an' I says, 'Oh, Sweet Lawd Jesus, if you'll jis let Della finish dese here clothes she promise she ain't never goin' to no mo' goviments.'"

"Didn't she pay you well, Della?"

"Yas, suh, she pay me. . . Tell me, suh, won't dat a Yankee lady?"

"Yes, Della, I believe she is from the North."

Della laughed for the first time now and I could imagine her grin at the other end of the wire.

"I knowed she was a Yankee."

"Why, Della?"

"By de way she talk an' de way she pay. After I done work like ten niggers all Fridy an' Saddy she gimme sebenty-five cents. Well, Jesus, I was plumb mad, yas, suh, I was. Den she say I could have all de left-obers in de ice box since she was goin' off on a trip. You know how much I taken out dat ice box?"

"What did you get?"

"I got one old ham bone — an' dat didn't ha' no meat on it! Now, Boss, I reckon you see how come I's sick in bed."

"Yes, Della, I do. But come up when you feel better and give us another chance."

But Della was through with government offices.

Della's story was only too true of the way some people treated Negroes but she was wrong when she believed that the greatest slave-drivers were residents who had come to us from the North. There were people who exploited laborers, particularly Negro laborers, among every class and kind just as there were, thank God, decent and considerate employers in various ranks of life, people who were trying to fight the prevalent abuses. Sometimes it seemed to me that men and women of "better families" were more disposed to be fair to their employees but when I remembered the miserably low wages paid to laborers in certain tobacco factories—some of which were presided over by Southerners with supposedly venerable names—I was inclined to avoid generalizations.

Evils and abuses and virtues belonged to an unclassifiable society-at-large. For example, I wrote in my notebook of an industrious brown-skinned girl who had to quit what I thought was to be a good place for her because of the well-thought-of citizen who was master of the house. All the undesirable masters were not to be found on one side of the railroad tracks. When a Virginia lady of distinguished lineage became enraged because a novelist showed a Virginia gentleman in a colored woman's house with his coat off, when the lady protested—as did so many others—that a novelist who was born to know better had singled out a rare instance of abnormal behavior, I should have liked to show her a few cases from the records I kept while working among the unemployed in the Old Dominion. Perhaps it was a sign of youth but I could not help being utterly without sympathy for our righteous front. We might as well stop bluffing. All of us had

our drawbacks. None of us had attained ideals or achieved any grounds for complacency.

9

WHEN Laurence asked me what diversion I found in Danville and I said that I worked and gardened and read, it may be that I did not speak the strictest truth. I forgot to tell him that I liked to attend gatherings which most people I knew would have shunned.

It was my friend, John Henry Wilson, who encouraged me to attend some Negro revivals. John—or the Reverend Wilson as he was known to his Sabbath flocks—was an expert gardener as well as a minister of God. Sometimes when the Holy Ghost descended upon him at a turn-out, he clapped his hands until the skin broke; but, even thus handicapped, he handled a spade and fork with admirable skill; he was the only Negro I could turn loose among my flowers and shrubs. He talked constantly while he worked, his black face was invaded by broad grins as he boasted of being the most sanctimonious preacher in the whole county. He forbade his followers to smoke, to dip snuff, to chew, to dress in bright colors, to ornament their persons, to make love out of wedlock, to gamble, and to swear.

"Guess how much I took in yestiddy?" he would say on Monday when he came to cut his grass. Always he spoke of my grass as *his* grass and most suggestions from me were resented as an insult to his intelligence.

"All you could get, I'm sure. You're no better than the other preachers."

"Ain't you shamed! . . . I was out in de country. Dem people gimme a whole fried chicken fer breakfast. After I et dat chicken I sho' could preach Jesus. I preached till

dem people was shoutin' an' rollin' on de flo'. An' when de plate was passed I took in two dollars an' forty-nine cents."

John grieved regularly because I was not a regular attendant of the church.

"All yo' peoples is good church folks an' it certain'y do look like you could be saved. It jis beats me. You don't look like no bad sinner. I sho' do wish you could git religion. Yo' flowers would grow better still if you was a Christian."

But he thought that his chances of converting me were as slim as I knew my chances were to interest him in being less productive.

"You sho' kin think of funny things," he said when I told him it was not necessary to have a pickaninny every year when he could not feed the nine or ten mouths he was responsible for as it was. He ignored such outbursts of craziness. He felt that he was a close friend (such a close friend that he thought nothing of asking for my suits long before I had ceased to wear them myself), and close friends had to pardon each other's peculiarities. Being fond of John and his kind was an expensive affection: when he made a little money he bought a large second-hand touring car and appeared at our back door not long afterward to inform me that his family had nothing to eat; and I knew without investigating that he was telling me the truth.

Well, he could garden beautifully, and I could forgive him much because he was energetic and talented. I did not care if he talked about my soul while he manured the roses or edged the grass. His kind of religion was lively and exciting and more easily understood than the long-faced missionary spirit of the superior whites. When I went to the Negro meetings and witnessed the kind of spectacle which Julia Peterkin has described perfectly for

all time, I knew that the black Christians went to church for a harmless purpose. The white-clad women ushers insisted on giving me a seat of prominence but I refused; even if I had not preferred to be at the back, I felt that I had no right to take a front pew in their church when they could not come to our churches at all except upon special occasions when they were segregated in the gallery.

From an inconspicuous point I could hear the wild, joyous singing and watch the antics of the saints when the Holy Ghost would come down all of a sudden to some sister who shrieked madly while her awed companions moaned in unison and kept time with their feet, like the most musical of Southerners that they were.

10

GOING to a Negro church may not have been the proper way to spend Sunday evenings in Virginia but it was less to be frowned upon socially than lending one's presence to a gathering of unionized laborers on lower Main. A conventional citizen would as soon be seen entering a house of ill fame as turning in the narrow doorway of the dilapidated store building where what was left of the United Textile Workers met Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons. Sometimes there were a few hundred workers on the benches in the dismal third floor auditorium but often there were no more than twenty or thirty.

My note-taking made me an object of suspicion to those who did not know me and Mrs. Roxy Dodson, the leader, had to explain that I was not associated with the *Bee* to keep me from being removed; once she could not explain quickly enough to suit me, since a man on the bench behind me was both well lit and well armed, a combination to be

feared upon such occasions as this. As the meeting became spirited, any species of stool pigeon might have been tempting game.

Roxy was a plumpish matron with curled flaxen hair. She strove to be gentle and refined until she was enraged: then her voice became piercing and her blue eyes flashed as she swore undying allegiance to Brother Gorman and the Cause. Now that trouble was stirring again in mills throughout the South, Danville had been left to this one flossily dressed woman and it was her job, with only a handful of workers earnestly supporting her, to make five or six thousand leave their tasks. She knew she had been given a large order; mill workers in Danville bore vivid memories of their former defeat and of promises that had never been fulfilled. But it was Roxy's job to be a faithful organizer and she did her best.

"We're goin' to the bottom if we don't stick together," she plead, shaking her curly bobbed head and walking close to the edge of the small rostrum. "We have behind us the best gentlemens as has ever existed in the United States, William Green, Francis J. Gorman, and Franklin D. Roozievelt. They want to see us get our rights. Now I want you workers to stand up and tell us what you think! You have just as much right as anybody else to speak your sentiments. The trouble with we Southern people is that we lets other people do our thinkin'."

The crowd was small and spiritless. I remembered the enthusiasm of the large Union gatherings in the days before the strike that failed, before organized labor in Danville had received what was called "its death blow" by the local press.

A dark, powerfully built young man with a wild gleam in his eye, arose and said, "If you all will just throw in your lot with us we could—"

"I'm sorry," Roxy said. "But I'll have to ask you to have a seat. We can't have no Reds speakin' here."

The man sat down without complaint.

"I wonder why you textile workers is scared to speak," the leader cried. "We don't *have* to be scared of nobody. When I go to Sunday School, people stares at me like I was a furriner and I been livin' here all my life and everybody knows my Daddy runs Prescott's Cleanin' Company. But I don't care. I know organized labor is our hope. The overseers is overbearin' and the stretch-out is terrible. The strike is on in the South and Brother Gorman told me to pull everybody here out of the plant. You all gotta help me. Haven't we got enough red-blooded people to stage a walk-out?"

Roxy's gang was weak and powerless and I was amazed that there was cause for alarm in town. Why did panic come so quickly when the so-called enemy was in our midst? The state troopers were guarding the mill gates again and extra police were recruited from the loafing-corners and pool rooms. Once again we were ready for destruction. . .

One hot night in early September fifty workers from the Hopewell mill center came to Danville to attend what Roxy called a Booster Meeting. Chief J. Hannibal Martin said the men were a flying squadron come to aid the enemy. After the men had gone to the meeting in Owls' Hall, the thirteen automobiles which had brought them from Hopewell were seized by our police, who were armed with Thompson machine guns and prepared for trouble. The delegates were marched to our courthouse; they were unarmed and some were hatless and coatless. They were not formidable to behold as they went along smiling amiably in spite of the pointed guns and menacing billies of their guards. Some of the younger visitors, mere boys who had

been engaged, they said, to drive the confiscated cars, sang, "Hail, hail, the gang's all here!" as they approached our seat of justice. If they had not been radicals before, would they be radical now?

Chief Martin, a big, powerful, square-jawed man with a vigilant eye for "Communists" and all critics of the capitalists' world, mounted the stone steps of the city hall while the rapidly growing mob gathered near.

"Any peaceful citizen of another town is welcome here," he said, claspng his gas gun at his side and looking out above the generous equipment of his officers. "But any person or group who tries to come here to tear down the city will have to do it over my dead body. Nobody is gonna do nothin' to Danville and Danville citizens!"

Then all the delegates, save four who were hauled to jail, were escorted by our well-armed police ten miles out on the road to Hopewell. Before turning back, a police lieutenant with a drawn revolver said, "Get yourselves outa here now an' dontcha never come back!" Thus Laborers and the Law parted.

It was a remarkable demonstration and I rushed to Western Union and tried to describe for out-of-town papers what the spectacle had been.

Early the next morning I started downtown to find out why four of the visitors had been detained to enjoy more of our hospitality. On the way, just as I was walking by the brick edifice of the First Baptist Church, a boy whom I had known all my life stopped his car and I got in with him to ride the rest of the way. He was the rich son of a rich father, he had been to the best of schools, and I supposed he was one of our future leaders.

"Chief certainly pulled a swell job last night, didn't he?"

"I'm not so sure. What law gave us the right to put the people out before they did anything? Maybe they *did*

come merely to attend a Booster Meeting, as they called it. We can't remove everybody from our midst as soon as we decide they *may* start some trouble—"

"Why, for Christ's sake, man, what ails you? Chief was easy on the lot. You know what I think we ought to do?"

"What?"

"I think the representative young men of Danville ought to lynch a few labor leaders. Then we'd be bothered with no more of this goddam foreign agitation."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't settle anything. It wouldn't bring peace. I don't admire the examples of organized labor we've had here but neither do I admire—"

Oh, well, why waste breath?

We switched the subject to the next game at Charlottesville, so as to be decently polite until we reached the courthouse where I thanked my friend for the ride and hurried toward the jail. Upon reaching the door of the square brick prison behind the high fence I made a careless mistake. Instead of asking to see the jailer in person, I asked permission to see the four guests from Hopewell: immediately this caused a brainstorm in the upper story of a big-eyed watchman who ran back to the jailer's quarters and announced that the Hopewell inmates had a visitor. . .

The jailer was shaving. He came across the stone hall with a safety razor in his hand and lather on his ample cheeks; he was a broad, sportily dressed man with a fair face and a wide mouth; his voice, to suit his profession, was imperious and loud or gentle and low.

"You better get away from that door *mighty damn quick!* If you don't purty quick, you'll be in here with your fine friends and we'll have five Reds instead of four—"

"You're mistaken. I'm—"

"I don't give a damn who you are. Get away from that door!"

I went down the alley to the street where some cops were discussing the victory of the night before. I asked them why the jailer needed to be so very gruff and stern. They assured me that I was wrong.

"He thought you was one of them Reds," said a short, stocky cop with pleasant brown eyes and an appealing smile. "Come on with me, Bud."

This time I was introduced to the freshly shaved jailer as the son of a city councilman and a reporter for the United Press. After the prelude, the door was opened and I received a firm handshake and a hearty welcome. The host of the jailhouse offered numerous apologies.

"That fool at the door told me you was one of them Reds and I thought he knew what he was sayin'. I didn't reckernize you. Why, boy, you know I wouldn'ta talked to you that way if I knowed who you was. Come right on in and speak with them Hopewell birds all you please."

We went down the damp, gray corridors and I saw a small, beady-eyed man and three youths behind the bars. They looked weary. The man, the organizer, did not appeal to me but the youths were not a bad-looking trio. They said they had not slept because the mattresses had been removed from their cots and they did not like stone floors as beds. Each of the four professed innocence.

"Your rookies may do us this way," smiled the small organizer who was used to being interviewed in jail, "but Uncle Sam wouldn't. Say, Bud, will you ask Sister Dodson to wire Brother Gorman that we're in jail? We need defense. Fine town you have! I'm crazy about it!"

"Thanks," I said, trying vainly to appreciate the grim humor of the small radical and realizing suddenly that I was painfully weary of all people who called me "Bud."

II

THE main doors of the police court chamber were locked but approved spectators were permitted to enter by a little door at the side. While the labor crowd stood in the hall, the benches inside were occupied by prominent citizenry, including the Young Men's Business Club, who had come en masse to support the chief whose actions they had publicly endorsed. Among this esteemed body there were a banker's son, a physician's son, the offsprings of mill stockholders, and other prominent young scions.

Magistrate Carter was trying the case but our aged mayor had come in, too, supported by Chief Martin, who was wearing a pink rosebud to express his good humor. The four prisoners were marched in: the small man and the three youths looked toward their defense and toward Sister Dodson whose presence, a lone woman among the suddenly exemplary males, caused considerable tittering from the Young Business Men and other picked spectators on the benches.

The prisoners were charged with using language tending to breach of the peace and with having resisted arrest. At the request of the defense Magistrate Carter said that we were entitled to know what language was used and to whom it was addressed.

A fat policeman mounted the stand and swore his oaths.

"I was tryin' to git Mr. Holt to go to where his car was settin' an' he tried to jerk loose. He said, 'Goddam it, turn me loose.' So I locked him up."

An extra deputy of brief experience was next.

"How long have you been on the force?"

"Two weeks yestiddy."

"Did you ever work for the mills?"

"Two years."

"What did you hear at the time these men were arrested?"

"When we put 'em in the car I hearn that boy say 'son of a bitch' an' I don't take that off nobody. I holped to take him out an' lock him up."

The small man and the youths told another kind of tale. They said they had come to attend a Booster meeting and that their intentions were peaceful. But what happened: they bothered nobody, but their cars were seized, they had been marched to headquarters at the point of bayonets.

"One cop stuck me in my pants leg and when I turned around he said, 'Dontcha gimme none of yer goddam lip, you dirty Hopewell rat!' And the gentlemens what arrested me said, 'You oughter all have yer necks wrung.'"

When the conflicting recitals were completed at last, Magistrate Carter decided that the small man deserved a fine of \$5 for saying, 'To hell with you' to an officer; one of the young men was fined \$10, allegedly for referring to policemen as sons of bitches; the other two were set free.

The strike in Danville that September was no more violent than this scene at the seat of justice. While real troubles were brewing in states to the south of us, while lives were being lost at Honea Path, all was quiet near the largest mills of Dixie. The state police were vigilant and the recruits to the ranks of law enforcers were like small boys with their first rifles, but all the display was wasted: Sister Dodson's small group of radicals gave no trouble.

"Where is Brother Gorman now?" said a reporter for the *Bee*.

"Brother Gorman is too big a man to come to one little old town," Roxy explained to all who asked. "He has to go all over the country, he even has to go to talk to Prezi-

dent Roozievelt. But I hope to tell you he ain't scared to come! Francis J. Gorman ain't scared of nobody."

One Sunday afternoon sometime after this, when one general strike was over and there was talk of another, Gorman came through Danville on his way north. I saw him in the hotel lobby. He was as dapper as ever in his Broadwayish gray clothes, though he did not seem so enthusiastic as he used to be; but, after all, Danville was like a graveyard for him. He told me Danville workers wanted him back and that there was great dissatisfaction in our midst—this, of course, was incredible to me, since I saw apathy where he claimed to see rebellion. He was interested in knowing what his enemies said about him. I told him they said he had left bills unpaid and that I had heard some eloquent talk of a more violent farewell party than that with which the Hopewell visitors had been honored. The organizer smiled sardonically.

"Danville people make nice playmates," he said icily.

That afternoon he moved on to another mill and few citizens knew that he had come and gone; members of "an entertainment committee" grieved that they had missed their chance, or so, at least, they said. The unheralded slipping in and out made me remember the spring day before the strike that was lost, the spring day when Gorman led the great parade up Main Street to proclaim a new day for mill hands of Danville.

EVERYWHERE there was autumn color. Tobacco markets were in full swing. In the warehouses buyers followed the sing-song chant of the auctioneers along the displays of brown and yellow leaves which farmers brought from their curing-barns with higher hopes than usual, because

the government was supposed to be against the old custom of buyers paying as little as they chose. The crowds were cheerful. Between the sales the men slipped away for a drink from the new A. B. C. store or hung around listening to the biggest talkers.

"Did you hear about that show what come here? It was named 'Green Pastures' and it was full of Yankee niggers makin' fun of the Bible. Yes-sir-ee, they had a big nigger actin' for the Lawd and all the Lawd's people was in it, too. Well, you know what? The coon what was actin' for Moses took sick here and died in the nigger horspital. Looks like that'd scare 'em but they—"

Such a recital was provoked by the sight of loud-talking Negroes going to and from the factories with their dinner pails. From Poor House Hill, from Crooktown, from Boatwright's Alley, from Broad Street Bottom, came the men and women who picked and stemmed tobacco leaves to make the satisfying cigarettes which seemed to make life so much happier for elegant ladies and gentlemen on magazine covers and billboards.

Late one afternoon I was walking through a Negro section when I saw Elviry Magee sitting on the sloping porch of her two-room shack beautified by gourd vines on the exterior and newspaper pictures on the walls within. Elviry was a dried-up little black woman with gray kinks standing up on a head flattened by basket-carrying when she was young. She was glad to see me, because my grandmother had been good to her and my father had lent her money.

"Lawd, honey, come on up an' set a spell," she said as she spread a clean paper over her rocker. "I sho is glad to see you."

"Are you in the factory now, Elviry?"

"No, suh, I reckon I's too old. You know, suh, I was ten years old when Lee surrendered and I been in de factory since I was sixteen."

"Then you've been working about sixty years?"

"Mebbe so, I ain't good at figures. I tell you one thing, I knows tobacco. I knows all de grades an' blends. I knows bright tobacco an' burley tobacco an' Kaintucky tobacco an' all de rest. You 'members Old Man Hughes what built all dese here schools an' horspitals in town? Well, I learnt Mister John how to grade tobacco when he first come in de factory. Yes, Jesus, I give Mister John his start. I'm po' now an' I was po' den but he come to be a rich man. But it didn't do him no good. De Lawd called him away wi' Bright's misery. I believes one reason was case he didn't pay niggers nothin'. I was his best hand—he say so hisse'f—an' he didn't never pay me no mo'n fifty to sebenty-five cents a day."

"But you've worked at other factories, haven't you? The tobacco men tell me you were one of the best stemmers in town."

"Yes, suh, I worked all 'roun but I ain't never made no mo'n ten dollars a week an' heap of de time I ain't made mo'n five. An' you has to 'member we don't get no mo'n six months a year. I ain't got nobody to take keer of me an' I couldn't save nothin'. An' I hates to git he'p off no goviments. But I ain't got long to wait. You know what de shout say?"

"What does it say?"

Elviry chanted in a low voice:

"When I kin read my titles clear
To mansions in de sky,
I bids farewell to ev'ry tear
An' wipes my weepin' eye."

WITH such happenings days passed into weeks. When October sunlight streamed over the lawn and the Setters plead with me to follow them over the hill beyond our oaks, I hated to be indoors for a single minute. But the coming of that patriotic Virginian, Bishop James Cannon, was more than I could miss, so I joined the crowd at the schoolhouse and found a seat between a gentleman chewing tobacco and a lady popping gum. In front of me were a row of little girls in starched dresses and hair ribbons; my sympathy for them was boundless, since it was close in the packed hall and they were much too young and too innocent to be interested in Public Morals; they gazed about at city councilmen and leading representatives of the Methodist and Baptist faith but there was nothing to amuse them.

When Bishop Cannon came in the door we stood to honor him as he crept painfully toward the platform. He crept painfully because he had very sore feet; a dry voice behind me said that the minister got "feet" trouble when he was spreading the Gospel in Africa and had never recovered. Each step seemed to be agonizing. His wrinkled face was puckered with grim frowns and his eyes were squinched behind his specs; he leaned heavily on his cane and one feared that his obsequious attendant, Mr. Richardson of the Anti-Saloon League, would have to support him before he reached his chair. But finally he got up the steps and dropped in the seat of prominence. He was fixed now, for he was privileged to sit down while he talked: he took out a large handkerchief and mopped his white head and withered face.

The Bishop may have looked sour and dyspeptic to any irreverent young man; but he was the idol of his au-

dience proper, who expressed their idolatry by a long ovation. And then they sang lustily from the inspiration of his presence.

My-kunt-ry-tiz-of-thee
Sweet-lan-uv-lib-uh-ty. . .

The music ended with the first of many volleys of loud AMENS from various corners of the hall.

"I get so many brickbats that I can't help appreciating a few bouquets," droned the voice of the seated divine. ". . . But I remember Our Lord and Master and how they crucified Him. . . You are a fine type of American men and women, a fine type of Christians, and I know you want the truth. We are here today because of the truth. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world because we are Jesus's followers and because we proclaim the truth—"

The gentleman on my left seemed to keep his wad of tobacco in the same spot of his mottled red cheek and the lady on my right popped her gum more apathetically as she became enthralled. But the poor little girls began to squirm and to titter. "Keep still! Hysh that fuss!" commanded their elders, but the poor little bodies longed for the out-of-doors. "I'm gonna beat you good when I git you home!"

"Where lies truth concerning the liquor traffic? It's the business of a preacher to preach the truth. The church must go along, like our Lord, doing what's right. We don't care what the general assembly thinks, what Congress thinks, what the president thinks. The *truth* is our trouble. Alcohol is still a narcotic poison that changes normal beings into silly fools and dangerous brutes. Has Repeal changed that?"

AMENS answered loudly.

"Well, the *truth* will stir up *strife*. The Son of God goes forth to *war*, doesn't he? We can't sit quietly and enjoy the Gospel. We must fight the devil. And the whisky traffic is sensual and devilish. It's criminal to sell intoxicating liquors just as it's criminal to sell cocaine or run a house of prostitution—"

The little girls fidgeted and scratched their noses and looked up at their parents who bore expressions of bliss on their stolid faces. Each word was the gospel and, as the Bishop's voice went up and down, sometimes becoming a thundering command, sometimes dwindling into a menacing low whisper, these Baracas and Willing Workers were wide-eyed and open-mouthed as they received the Message.

"Who are the *fanatics*?" cried the Bishop. "Let me pay a compliment right here to our own Commander Richard Evelyn Byrd, who stood up against high society crowds of which he's a part and who ridiculed him because he didn't drink liquor. And let me tell you that, when I was in Europe preaching to soldiers, I met Lady Astor and she rushed up to me and said, 'I know you. They call you *that damned Cannon* but I wish there were a hundred like you. . . .'

"They say we didn't do our part to keep Prohibition. When Coolidge was president I appealed to him. He was a polite man of few words. He told me he wasn't an enforcement officer. I went to see Andrew Mellon and he was as cold as an iceberg and listened to me like a bump on a log—anyway, tell me, wasn't he a partner in a distillery business? Then Senator Glass came along. Why didn't our own senator from Virginia rise up and ask for forty million when Mellon gave a measly little twenty-five million for enforcement? Then there was Hoover—Hoover promised what he never did. And now we have

Roosevelt in the White House. He's doing the best he knows how, and I'm not going to rock the boat, but why doesn't he come out and admit *Repeal was wrong?* . . . Well, we'll keep on fighting! I haven't left the firing line a minute. Some say I can't last forever but I'm just seventy now and my father lived to be eighty. I'll live to see Prohibition back, don't worry!"

Cries of AMEN and PRAISE JESUS filled the auditorium when the sermon reached its end at last. Then some Elders passed tin pie plates and we were urged to give to the Cause of Temperance. "Pull out a dollar!" called the Bishop, but few responded. "If you can't put in ten cents, put in a nickel!"

After the benediction the crowd pressed forward to shake hands with the speaker. An ashen-faced lady near me said, "We had a purty good turn-out but we oughter had the whole town. People kin set two hours in a pitcher show ruinin' their morals but they hasn't all got the sense to take a chance to hear the real sho' nuff word of Jeezuz."

I went out of the schoolhouse and started home by way of Rison's Alley, the back route, where I saw Negroes enjoying the Sabbath on their rickety porches. I was thinking about Prohibition and the Cannon kind of Virginian; men like the Bishop exerted tremendous control and their power seemed to grow with the years. I wondered if such men really helped their own admirers. Seriously, though, if I had believed they could make people drink moderately I should have had more sympathy for their clowning. So many fellows were drinking themselves to imbecility. Former friends, who had appeared to have good chances for some sort of success in life when we were in school together, now were bleary-eyed sots. One fellow I used to admire tremendously was delivered to his father's porch at early hours by less drunken Good Samaritans;

once the cook found him under the hedge when she came in to work. . .

Whenever somebody came back to town after a long absence, and you tried to list the news of those who had stayed at home, the recital was something like this: "Johnny's doing well in tobacco. So are Pete and Buck and Harvey. Sammie is at the mill offices. Louis? Oh, he's taking a cure. You know what I mean. Paul? Well, it's bad about him. He and Ned belong to the gang who've given up. They're just drinking, just drinking. . ."

14

It was our way to profess that criticism of our part of the world was pardonable, if it came from within, but the truth was that unexpected outbursts from the family circle were hotly resented. It is a foul bird that spoils its own nest, the old people said, and the young took up the cry. Although all of us knew that too many people drank their lives away, for instance, we were not inclined to broadcast the fact; most of us had some dear relative or friend who loved liquor too well and we did not care to discuss any unpleasant subjects which were close to home.

Drinking was but one of innumerable matters we did not wish to bring to outside attention. For another example, we were enraged when foreigners from the North said that we were lazy; but we laughed among ourselves at persons who never did anything except to sit on porches and to talk. We sympathized with a husband who said that his wife had been talking over the telephone ever since he married her, "talking while other women worked." We talked about lazy people who were in debt and, yet, would board the street car to go half a dozen blocks.

We were irritated sometimes when love of leisure was

carried to excess in business. One afternoon I went to a nurseryman's farm with money to buy some shrubs: I saw the fine plants but I could not buy a one because the nurseryman had gone to town and his wife was taking a nap and did not wish to be disturbed; there was no one to show the shrubs. Another day I met a man who had moved to our town from a Northern city. He was in a frenzy because he could not induce a merchant to send him some hardware supplies he had ordered the day before.

"When I call about the supplies, the storekeeper asks me how I like boarding with Mrs. Jones and how Mrs. Jones's mother is and how Sam Jones is doing on the tobacco market. I don't give a damn about Mrs. Jones or Mrs. Jones's mother or Sam Jones's tobacco market. But God knows I want those supplies!"

No brief tale seemed to express the spirit of a great number of our people more successfully than that.

We marveled at people who were over-industrious. We laughed at the Booster spirit, although we knew we would have to cultivate some form of aggressiveness, even if it brought a quantity of buffoonery and cheapness with it, if we were to survive in America. The Boosters were among those who were inheriting the South. It was profoundly shocking—even if it was amusing—when a Main Street pastor advertised so extensively that ladies found his face smiling at them when their sheets came back from the laundry, printed circulars even having been stuck in laundry packages to remind householders of their spiritual duties. There was such enterprise at one extreme and lethargy at another. Somewhere, mostly in the minds of dreamers, there was a moderate way.

But why pick flaws? Why complain? Why grouch? Why not lay foolish notions aside, join the great masses of

cooperating citizens and live comfortably, beloved and respected by one's fellow men?

Were we not a charming race in this country of broom-sedge fields and pines, of rambling gardens with spring japonicas and summer myrtles? Did we not treasure the soft voice and the gentle manner?

But with all that we were strangely sensitive, hot-blooded, and still held prisoners by our inheritance.

No idea of ours was worse than that civilized people could not live amicably even when they disagreed concerning affairs beyond our individual homes and gardens. That idea, with the poisonous effect it had on easily persuaded persons, was never impressed upon me more forcibly than one unforgettable week of this fall when I had been disagreeing too often with those who were dispensing Virginia's share of the New Deal gifts. Although I knew that some down-and-out citizens had been helped immeasurably, I knew just as well that numerous shiftless and undeserving people were cashing in upon the unprecedented generosity for all they were worth. Getting something for nothing appealed strongly to certain elements of our society and I did not believe it was wise to encourage such indolence. Going over my notebook and selecting a number of cases, I wrote what I thought was a mild and inoffensive little article. It was called "Is Relief Breeding Idlers?" and it was published in the *New York Herald Tribune* and several other papers. The Virginian who stood between our bureau and Washington informed me that I had been indiscreet and unethical and that, as long as I worked for his part of the Federal government in Virginia, I was forbidden to write anything at all concerning the alphabetical agencies to which I had been so deplorably unfaithful. An enthusiastic New Deal editor, whose wife

had landed a relief job, could go on editorializing. A fellow-worker who penned New Deal eulogies for state papers could go on praising. But I was silenced! And, my God, how little I had told, stating brief cases of a few chiselers and mentioning a few abuses that could be corrected if they were impressed upon the public. Now that I was silenced I wished that I had done better. Daily there were farces in the bureaus which would have made much more amusing stories than the ones I had told. I thought of the emergency official who tried to give a little efficiency talk to his personnel; he had resolved to make his force turn over new leaves in their governmental careers.

"I'm tired of your careless ways," he said. "You seem to care more about leaving early and getting your checks than you do about the good of the office. I want to tell you right now that you are a long way from being perfect office workers—"

"And I want to tell *you* right now," snapped a feminine voice from the staff, who knew that the politicians, and not this young bureaucrat, were their superiors, "*you* are a long way from being a perfect director. Have you ever thought about that?"

Dozens of comedies like this came to mind. The public paid for them but the public was not to be told anything about them? Were we to censor all the true tales and cover up everything that went wrong?

The week after I quit my government job I received offers of three other government jobs in Virginia, it being stipulated in each case that what the director had termed "a tone of bitterness" in my article would have to be curbed, being unsuited to a Federal Servant. But, in spite of my need to make a living, my enthusiasm for the New Deal bureaus seemed to have vanished and I began to jest

about Nazi Germany in the Old Dominion after people, who were concerned, used various methods to inform me that it would be wrong for me to write what I knew.

There was one good thing. As I wrote in my notebook with great satisfaction, there were some Virginians who agreed with me as well as those who frowned. Not everyone would laud petty movements and family plots—all in the name of Charity.

15

Now it was winter. Heavy frost had killed every flower in the garden save a few sprigs of verbena and alyssum which bloomed valiantly, in spite of wind and cold. Bulbs of tulips and narcissi were buried in rich earth with bone meal to make them flourish in the spring. A light mulch of brush and fallen leaves lay over the serpentine borders where hardy perennials had withered to the ground.

Now it was the hunting season. Dan, the pointer, danced madly at the sight of my father with his gun. But Fan, the small black and white Llewellyn, was frightened and distraught, for she was young and not well broken, and it would be hard for her if she flushed a covey of birds from a thicket by the creek or from some broomsedge field above the river. At night she came back weary, forlorn, utterly lacking in the sense of victory which the pointer showed when the string of partridges and doves was hung on the back porch before the cook was ready to pick the soft down and feathers.

Bird suppers were favorite affairs of the autumn and winter seasons. After the hunts, my aunts and uncles were invited to eat the delicate meat of quails and the golden Sally Luns which were part of the traditional feast.

After one of these assemblies, I was listening to my older

relatives as they sat by the fire telling stories of the past. One of my aunts, in an aside to me, said, "You won't go away any time soon, will you?"

"Why do you think I won't?"

"Well, you planted a lot of bulbs and roots. You'll want to see them bloom."

"I want to go away again now. But I'll come back, of course. A boy I knew wrote about leaving North Carolina forever, another fellow wrote what was really a formal farewell to his state. They are just two I happen to think of now. But I don't see how anybody can cut away entirely what is part of his mind and heart and everything else—"

My gray-haired but youthful father spoke now.

"All the young bloods want to go out and see the world but they all learn what's best. Now you just look at this kid of mine. He always wants to strike off for some far-off place. When he's here he grumbles and grouches and criticizes, as though we didn't have the best state and the best town in the South. He fusses about things that everybody knows are wrong but fussing can't help; and he wears himself out for nothing. And, anyway, he's just got a lot of crazy ideas, too. But when he gets away—why you couldn't keep him from coming back!"

In the corner of the room my mother was sitting by a drop-leaf table; an old lamp cast a glow over her face. Even before she spoke I had an idea what she would say and I knew that being proud of her sincerity was a lasting joy.

"There's too much wrong here to talk about the best of anything," she said. "I hate that kind of talk. If we stay in one little town in the South forever, it's too easy for us to become smug and complacent when lots of things are far from perfect and we needn't try to fool anybody by

saying they are. If staying right here all the time will make my children smug and complacent, then I hope they'll all go away long enough to change their minds."

The conversation, much to the relief of a relative, who felt even more strongly than any of the others that our town was the world, was turned to more cheerful subjects. I got up and went out-of-doors. A full moon was high over the elms. At the far end of the garden the pointer in his kennel was howling madly because a train was going by with brilliant lights flashing through the darkness over the hills. Dan howled as though he might have been in death agony but little Fan, the reluctant huntress, lay in her bed of straw and watched the great hunter without showing any sign of sympathy. When I came near, she swished her tail calmly while Dan plead for help as the engine roared down the tracks.

"Hush, sir, hush," I said. "Fan will remember this the next time you two go for a hunt."

Dan became less frightened; but I had to hold his collar to quiet him while I watched the last cars of the express train hurrying through the darkness toward the cities of the North. The train made me both happy and regretful as it rushed past our mills and factories, past a wintry Main Street, past the sprawling settlements where Negroes and poor whites were crowded in their crude shacks along the river.



